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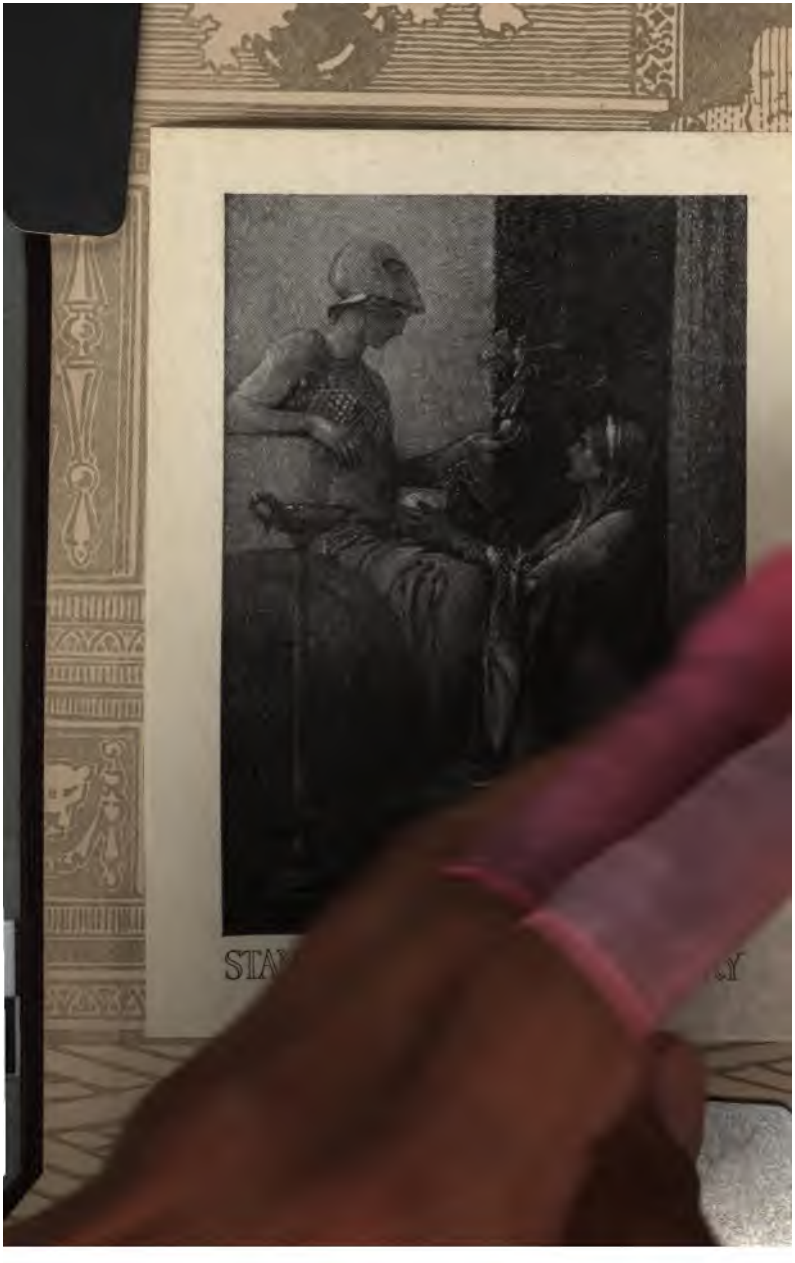

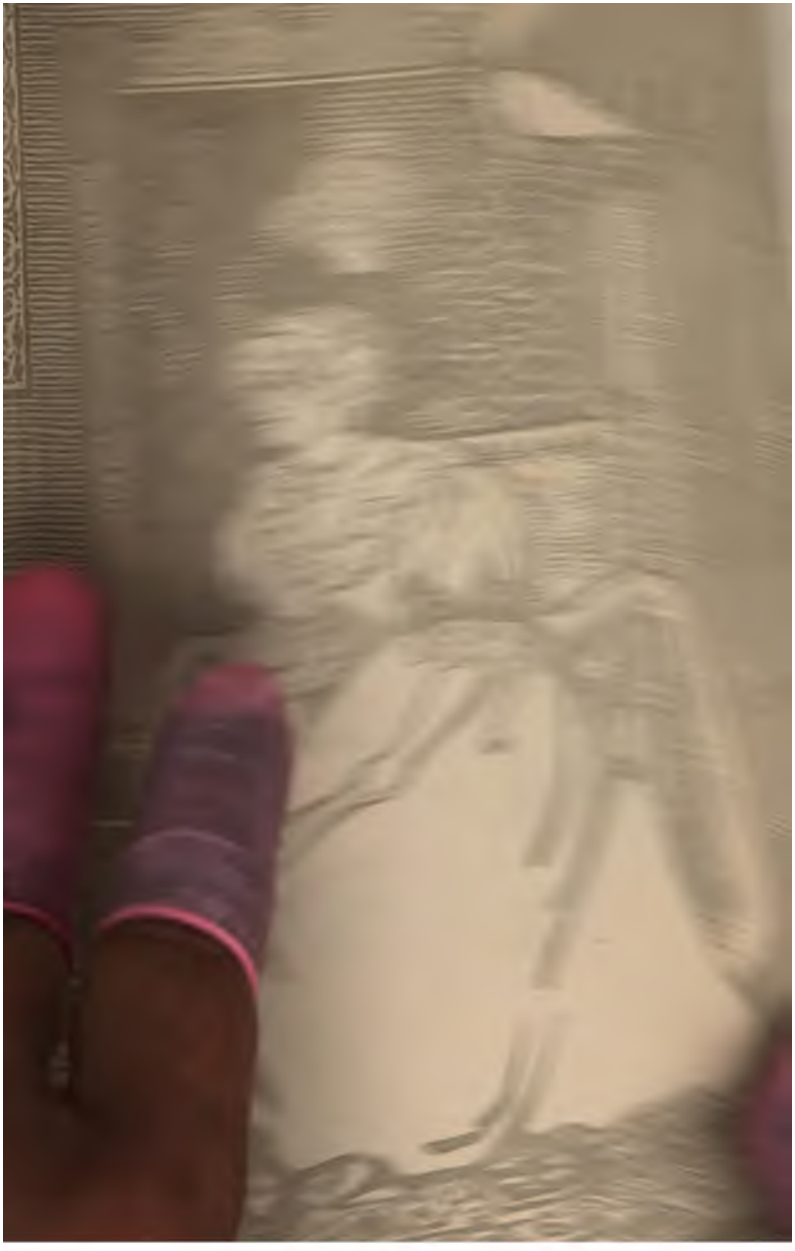

God's Territory.

THE ROMANCES OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

LOUISE DE LA VALLIÈRE

Being Adventures of

THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

Volume Two

The D'Artagnan Romances

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

THREEFOLD LOVE.

As soon as Buckingham had gone, De Guiche imagined that the field would be open to him without a rival. Monsieur, who no longer retained the slightest feeling of jealousy, and who besides permitted himself to be monopolized by the Chevalier de Lorraine, allowed as much liberty in his house as the most exacting person could desire. The king, on his side, who had conceived a taste for Madame's society, invented entertainment upon entertainment in order to enliven her residence in Paris; so that not a day passed without a ball at the Palais-Royal or a reception in Monsieur's apartments. The king had directed that Fontainebleau should be prepared for the reception of the court, and every one was using his utmost interest to get invited.

Madame led a life of incessant occupation; neither her voice nor her pen was idle for a moment. The conversations with De Guiche were gradually assuming an interest which might be recognized as the prelude of a deep-seated attachment. When eyes look languishingly while the subject under discussion happens to be the colors of materials for dresses; when a whole hour is occupied in analyzing the merits and the perfume of a sachet or a flower, — in this style of conversation there are words to which every one might listen, but there are gestures and sighs which every one is not allowed to perceive. After Madame had talked for some time with M. de

Guiche, she conversed with the king, who paid her a visit regularly every day. They played, wrote verses, or selected mottoes and emblematical devices. That spring was not only the spring-time of Nature ; it was the youth of an entire people, of which those at court were the head. The king was handsome, young, and of unequalled gallantry. All women were passionately loved by him, even the queen his wife. This great king was, however, more timid and more reserved than any other person in the kingdom, — to such a degree, indeed, that he had not confessed his sentiments even to himself. This timidity of bearing restrained him within the limits of ordinary politeness, and no woman could boast of having received preference beyond another. It might be foretold that the day when his real character would be displayed would be the dawn of a new sovereignty ; but as yet he had not declared himself. M. de Guiche took advantage of this to constitute himself the sovereign prince of the whole court of love. It had been reported that he was on the best of terms with Mademoiselle de Montalais ; that he had been assiduously attentive to Mademoiselle de Châtillon ; but now he was not even barely civil to any of the court beauties. He had eyes and ears but for one person alone. In this manner, and as it were without design, he resumed his place with Monsieur, who had a great regard for him, and kept him as much as possible in his own apartments. Unsociable from natural disposition, he was too reserved before the arrival of Madame, but after her arrival he was not reserved enough.

This conduct, which every one had observed, had been particularly remarked by the evil genius of the house, the Chevalier de Lorraine, for whom Monsieur exhibited the warmest attachment, because he was of a very cheerful disposition even in his most malicious remarks, and

because he was never at a loss how to make the time pass away. The Chevalier de Lorraine, therefore, seeing that he was threatened with being supplanted by De Guiche, resorted to strong measures. He disappeared from the court, leaving Monsieur much embarrassed. The first day of his disappearance, Monsieur hardly inquired about him; for De Guiche was there, and except the time devoted to conversation with Madame, the count's days and nights were rigorously devoted to the prince. On the second day, however, Monsieur, finding no one near him, inquired where the chevalier was. He was told that no one knew.

De Guiche, after having spent the morning in selecting embroideries and fringes with Madame, went to console the prince. But after dinner, as there were tulips and amethysts to look at, De Guiche returned to Madame's boudoir. Monsieur was left quite to himself during the hour devoted to his toilet; he felt that he was the most miserable of men, and again inquired whether there was any news of the chevalier, in reply to which he was told that no one knew where Monsieur the Chevalier was to be found. Monsieur, hardly knowing in what direction to inflict his weariness, went to Madame's apartments dressed in his morning-gown and cap. He found a large assemblage of people there, laughing and whispering in every part of the room. At one end were a group of women around one of the courtiers, talking together amid smothered bursts of laughter; at the other end Manicamp and Malicorne were being pillaged by Montalais and Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and two other laughing maids of honor. In a farther corner was Madame, seated upon some cushions, with De Guiche on his knees beside her, spreading out a handful of pearls and precious stones, while she, with her white and slen-

der finger pointed out such among them as pleased her the most. Again, in another corner of the room, a guitar-player was humming some of the Spanish seguedillas, to which Madame had taken the greatest fancy ever since she had heard them sung by the young queen with tender melancholy. But the songs which the Spaniard had sung with tears in her eyes, the young Englishwoman was humming with a smile which displayed her pearly teeth. The boudoir presented, in fact, a scene of hilarious enjoyment.

As he entered, Monsieur was struck at beholding so many persons enjoying themselves without him. He was so jealous at the sight that he could not resist saying, like a child, "What! you are amusing yourselves here, while I weary myself all alone!"

The sound of his voice was like a clap of thunder which interrupts the warbling of birds in the leafy branches; a dead silence ensued. De Guiche was on his feet in a moment. Malicorne tried to hide himself behind Montalais's dress. Manicamp stood bolt upright, and assumed a very ceremonious demeanor. The guitar-player thrust the guitar under a table, covering it with a piece of carpet to conceal it from the prince's observation. Madame alone did not move, and smiling at her husband, replied to him, "Is not this the hour which you usually devote to your toilet?"

"An hour which others select, it seems, for amusing themselves," grumbled the prince.

This untoward remark was the signal for a general rout. The women fled like a flock of frightened birds; the guitar-player vanished like a shadow. Malicorne, still protected by Montalais, who widened out her dress, glided behind the hanging tapestry. As for Manicamp, he went to the assistance of De Guiche, who naturally remained near

Madame; and both of them, with the princess herself, courageously sustained the attack. The count was too happy to bear malice against the husband; but Monsieur bore a grudge against his wife. He had been wanting a motive for a quarrel; he sought it. And the hurried departure of the crowd, which had been so merry before he arrived, and was so disturbed by his entrance, furnished him with a pretext.

"Why do they take to flight at the sight of me?" he inquired in a rough tone.

To this remark Madame replied coldly, "Whenever the master of the house makes his appearance, the household keep aloof out of respect."

As Madame said this, she made so funny and so pretty a grimace that De Guiche and Manicamp could not control themselves; they burst into a peal of laughter. Madame followed their example; and even Monsieur himself could not resist it, and was obliged to sit down, since in laughing he had sacrificed his dignity. However, he very soon left off; but his anger had increased. He was still more furious at having allowed himself to laugh than at having seen others laugh. He stared at Manicamp, not venturing to show his anger towards De Guiche. But at a sign which displayed too great an amount of annoyance, Manicamp and De Guiche left the room; so that Madame, deserted, began sadly to pick up her pearls, no longer laughing, and speaking still less.

"I am very happy," said the duke, "to find myself treated as a stranger here, Madame;" and he left the room in a passion.

On his way out he met Montalais, who was in attendance in the anteroom. "It is very agreeable to pay you a visit here," said he, — "but outside the door."

Montalais made a very low obeisance. "I do not quite understand," said she, "what your royal Highness does me the honor to say."

"I say, Mademoiselle, that when you are all laughing together in Madame's apartment, he is an unwelcome visitor who does not remain outside."

"Your royal Highness certainly does not think and speak so of yourself."

"On the contrary, Mademoiselle, it is on my own account that I do speak and think. I have no reason, certainly, to flatter myself on the reception I meet with here. How is it that on the very day when there is music and a little society in Madame's apartments, — in my own apartments, indeed, for they are mine, — on the very day when I wish to amuse myself a little in my turn, every one runs away? Are they afraid to see me, that they all took to flight as soon as I appeared? Is there anything wrong, then, going on in my absence?"

"But," replied Montalais, "nothing has been done to-day, Monseigneur, which is not done every day."

"What! do they laugh like that every day?"

"Why, yes, Monseigneur."

"Every day the same groups of people and the same strumming as just now?"

"The guitar, Monseigneur, was introduced to-day; but when we have no guitars, we have violins and flutes. Women get wearied without music."

"*Peste!* and the men!"

"What men, Monseigneur!"

"M. de Guiche, M. de Manicamp, and the others."

"They all belong to Monseigneur's household."

"Yes, yes, you 're right, Mademoiselle," said the prince; and he returned to his own apartments, full of thought. He threw himself into the deepest of his arm-chairs, with-

out looking at himself in the glass. "Where can the chevalier be?" said he.

One of the prince's attendants who happened to be near him, overheard his remark, and replied, "No one knows, Monseigneur."

"Still the same answer! The first one who answers me again, 'I do not know,' I will discharge."

Every one at this remark hurried out of the apartments, in the same manner as the others had fled from Madame's apartments. The prince then flew into the wildest rage. He kicked over a chiffonnier, which tumbled upon the floor, broken into pieces. He next went into the galleries, and with the greatest coolness threw down, one after another, an enamelled vase, a porphyry ewer, and a bronze candelabra. All this made a frightful noise, and every one appeared in the various doorways.

"What is your Highness's pleasure?" hazarded the captain of the Guards, timidly.

"I am treating myself to some music," replied Monseigneur, gnashing his teeth.

The captain of the Guards desired his royal Highness's physician to be sent for. But before he came, Malicorne arrived, saying to the prince, "Monseigneur, M. le Chevalier de Lorraine is here."

The duke looked at Malicorne, and smiled graciously at him, just as the chevalier entered.

CHAPTER XXXV.

M. DE LORRAINE'S JEALOUSY.

THE Duc d'Orléans uttered a cry of delight on perceiving the Chevalier de Lorraine. "This is fortunate, indeed!" he said. "By what happy chance do I see you? Had you indeed disappeared, as every one assured me?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"Some caprice?"

"I to venture upon caprices with your Highness! The respect —"

"Put respect out of the way, for you fail in it every day. I absolve you. But why did you go away?"

"Because I felt that I was of no use to you."

"Explain yourself."

"Your Highness has people about you who are far more amusing than I can ever be. I felt that I was not strong enough to enter into a contest with them, and I therefore withdrew."

"This extreme diffidence shows a want of common sense. Who are those with whom you cannot contend, — Guiche?"

"I name no one."

"This is absurd! Does Guiche annoy you?"

"I do not say that, Monseigneur. Do not force me to speak, however; you know very well that De Guiche is one of our best friends."

"Who is it, then?"

"Excuse me, Monseigneur; let us say no more about it, I beg of you." The chevalier knew perfectly well that curiosity is excited in the same way as thirst, — by removing that which quenches it; or, in other words, by delaying the explanation.

"No; I wish to know why you went away."

"In that case, Monseigneur, I will tell you; but do not be angry. I perceived that my presence was disagreeable."

"To whom?"

"To Madame."

"What do you mean?" said the duke, in astonishment.

"It is simple enough: Madame is very probably jealous of the regard you are good enough to testify for me."

"Has she shown it to you?"

"Monseigneur, Madame never addresses a syllable to me, — particularly since a certain time."

"Since what time?"

"Since the time when, M. de Guiche having made himself more agreeable to her than I could, she receives him at all hours."

The duke colored. "At all hours, Chevalier? What do you mean by that?" said he, sternly.

"You see, Monseigneur, that I have displeased you; I was quite sure I should."

"I am not displeased; but you say things a little strong. In what respect does Madame prefer De Guiche to you?"

"I shall say no more," said the chevalier, with a ceremonious bow.

"On the contrary, I require you to speak. If you withdraw on that account, you must indeed be very jealous."

"One cannot help being jealous, Monseigneur, when one loves. Is not your royal Highness jealous of Madame? Would not your royal Highness, if you saw some one always near Madame and always treated with great favor, take umbrage at it? One's friends are as one's lovers. Your royal Highness has sometimes conferred upon me the distinguished honor of calling me your friend."

"Yes, yes; but here again is an equivocal expression. Chevalier, you are unfortunate in your remarks."

"What expression, Monseigneur?"

"You said, 'treated with great favor.' What do you mean by 'favor'?"

"Nothing can be more simple, Monseigneur," said the chevalier, with great frankness. "For instance, when a husband remarks that his wife summons, from preference, such and such a man near her; when this man is always to be found by her side or in attendance at the door of her carriage; when that man is always found within reach of her hand; when persons get together beyond the reach of general conversation; when the bouquet of the one is always of the same color as the ribbons of the other; when concerts and supper-parties are held in the private apartments; when a dead silence takes place as soon as the husband makes his appearance in his wife's rooms; and when the husband suddenly finds that he has as a companion the most devoted and the kindest of men, who a week before was with him as little as possible, — why, then — "

"Well, finish!"

"Why, then, I say, Monseigneur, one possibly may get jealous. But all these details hardly apply; for our conversation had nothing to do with them."

The duke was evidently much agitated, and seemed

contending with himself. "You have not told me," he at last remarked, "why you absented yourself. A little while ago you said it was from fear of intruding; you added, even, that you had observed a disposition on Madame's part to encourage De Guiche."

"Ah, Monseigneur, I did not say that!"

"You did, indeed."

"Well, if I did say so, I noticed nothing but what was very inoffensive."

"At all events, you remarked something."

"You embarrass me, Monseigneur."

"What does that matter? Answer me! If you speak the truth, why should you feel embarrassed?"

"I always speak the truth, Monseigneur; but I also always hesitate when it is a question of repeating what others say."

"Ah! you are repeating? It appears that it is talked about, then?"

"I acknowledge that others have spoken to me on the subject."

"Who?"

The chevalier assumed almost an angry air as he replied: "Monseigneur, you are subjecting me to an examination; you treat me like a criminal at the bar. The rumors which touch a gentleman's ears in passing do not tarry there. Your Highness wishes me to magnify the rumor until it attains the importance of an event."

"However," said the duke, in great displeasure, "the fact remains that you yourself withdrew on account of this report."

"To speak the truth, others have talked to me of the attentions of M. de Guiche to Madame, — nothing more; perfectly harmless, I repeat, and, more than that, permissible. But do not be unjust, Monseigneur, and do

not attach an undue importance to it. It does not concern you."

"Gossip about M. de Guiche's attentions to Madame does not concern me?"

"No, Monseigneur; and what I say to you I would say to De Guiche himself, so little do I think of the court he pays Madame. Nay, I would say it even to Madame herself. Only, you understand what I am afraid of; I am afraid of being thought jealous of the favor shown, when I am only jealous so far as friendship is concerned. I know your disposition; I know that when you bestow your affections you become exclusively attached. You love Madame, — and who, indeed, would not love her? Follow me attentively as I proceed. Madame has noticed among your friends the handsomest and most fascinating of them all; she will begin to influence you on his behalf in such a way that you will neglect the others. Your indifference would kill me; it is already bad enough to have to endure that of Madame. I have therefore made up my mind, Monseigneur, to give way to the favorite whose happiness I envy, even while I acknowledge my sincere friendship and sincere admiration for him. Now, do you see anything to object to in this reasoning? Is it not that of a man of honor? Is my conduct that of a sincere friend? Answer me, at least, after having so closely questioned me."

The duke had seated himself, with his head buried in his hands and his hair dishevelled. After a silence long enough to enable the chevalier to judge of the effect of his oratorical display, Monseigneur rose, saying, "Come, be candid."

"As I always am."

"Very well. You know that we have already observed something respecting that mad fellow, Buckingham."

"Oh, do not say anything against Madame, Monseigneur, or I shall take my leave. What! do you go so far as to be suspicious of Madame?"

"No, no, Chevalier, I do not suspect Madame; but, in fact, I observe — I compare —"

"Buckingham was a madman, Monseigneur."

"A madman about whom, however, you opened my eyes thoroughly."

"No, no," said the chevalier, quickly; "it was not I who opened your eyes, it was De Guiche. Do not confound us, I beg!" and he began to laugh so harshly that it sounded like the hiss of an adder.

"Yes, yes; I remember. You said a few words, but De Guiche showed the most jealousy."

"I should think so," continued the chevalier, in the same tone. "He was fighting for home and altar."

"What did you say?" said the duke, haughtily, thoroughly roused by this insidious jest.

"Am I not right, for is not M. de Guiche the first gentleman of your household?"

"Well," replied the duke, somewhat calmed, "had this passion of Buckingham been remarked?"

"Certainly."

"Very well. Do people say that M. de Guiche's is remarked as much?"

"Pardon me, Monseigneur; you are again mistaken. No one says that M. de Guiche entertains anything of the sort."

"Very good."

"You see, Monseigneur, that it would have been better, a hundred times better, to have left me in my retirement, than to have allowed yourself to conjure up, by the aid of any scruples which I may have had, suspicions which Madame will regard as crimes; and she will be right too."

"What would you do?"

"Act reasonably."

"In what way?"

"I should not pay the slightest attention to the society of these new Epicureans; and in that way the rumors will cease."

"I will see; I will think it over."

"Oh, you have time enough! The danger is not great, and then, besides, it is not a question either of danger or of passion. It all arose from a fear of seeing your friendship for me decrease. From the very moment when you restore it to me with so kind an assurance, I have no longer any other idea in my head."

The duke shook his head, as if he meant to say, "If you have no more ideas, I have, though."

The dinner-hour having arrived, the prince sent to inform Madame of it, who returned a message to the effect that she could not be present at the feast, but would dine in her own apartment.

"That is not my fault," said the duke. "This morning, having taken them by surprise in the midst of a musical assembly, I got jealous; and so they are in the sulks with me."

"We will dine alone," said the chevalier, with a sigh; "I regret that De Guiche is not here."

"Oh, De Guiche will not remain long in the sulks; he is a very good-natured fellow."

"Monseigneur," said the chevalier, suddenly, "an excellent idea has struck me in our conversation just now. I may have exasperated your Highness, and caused you some dissatisfaction. It is but fitting that I should be the mediator. I will go and look for the count, and bring him back with me."

"Ah, Chevalier, you are a good soul!"

"You say that as if you were surprised."

"Well, you are not so tender-hearted every day."

"That may be; but confess that I know how to repair a wrong I may have done."

"I confess that."

"Will your Highness do me the favor to wait here a few minutes?"

"Willingly; be off, and I will try on my Fontainebleau costume."

The chevalier left the room, and called his attendants with the greatest care, as if he were giving them various orders. All went off in different directions, but he retained his *valet de chambre*. "Ascertain," said he, "and immediately too, whether M. de Guiche is not in Madame's apartments. How can it be ascertained?"

"Very easily, Monsieur the Chevalier. I will ask Malicorne, who will learn it from Mademoiselle de Montalais. I may as well tell you, however, that the inquiry will be useless; for all M. de Guiche's attendants have gone, and he must have left with them."

"Try to find out, nevertheless."

Ten minutes had hardly passed when the valet returned. He beckoned his master mysteriously towards the servants' staircase, and showed him into a small room with a window looking out upon the garden. "What is the matter?" said the chevalier; "why so many precautions?"

"Look, Monsieur!" said the valet, "look yonder, under the walnut-tree!"

"Ah! *Mon Dieu!*" said the chevalier, "I see Manicamp there. What is he waiting for?"

"You will see if you wait patiently. There, do you see now?"

"I see one, two, four musicians with their instruments,

and behind them, urging them on, De Guiche himself. What is he doing there, though?"

"He is waiting until the little door of the staircase belonging to the ladies of honor is opened; by that staircase he will ascend to Madame's apartments, where some new pieces of music are going to be performed during dinner."

"This is admirable that you tell me."

"Is it not, Monsieur?"

"Was it M. Malicorne who told you this?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"He likes you, then?"

"No, Monsieur; it is Monsieur whom he likes."

"Why?"

"Because he wishes to belong to his household."

"*Mordieu!* so he shall. How much has he given you for that?"

"The secret which I now dispose of to you, Monsieur."

"And which I buy for a hundred pistoles. Take them."

"Thank you, Monsieur. Look! the little door opens; a woman admits the musicians."

"It is Montalais."

"Hush, Monsieur! Do not call out her name; whoever says Montalais, says Malicorne. If you quarrel with the one, you will be on bad terms with the other."

"Very well; I have seen nothing."

"And I," said the valet, pocketing the purse, "have received nothing."

The chevalier, being now certain that De Guiche had entered, returned to Monsieur, whom he found splendidly dressed and radiant with joy as well as with beauty. "I am told," he exclaimed, "that the king has taken the sun as his device; really, Monseigneur, it is you whom this device would better suit."

"Where is De Guiche?"

"He cannot be found. He has fled, has evaporated entirely. Your scolding of this morning has scared him away. He could not be found in his apartments."

"Bah! the hare-brained fellow is capable of setting off post-haste to his own estates. Poor fellow! we will recall him. Come, let us dine now."

"Monseigneur, to-day is a day of ideas; I have another."

"What is it?"

"Monseigneur, Madame is angry with you, and she has reason to be so. You owe her her revenge; go and dine with her."

"Oh, that would be acting like a weak husband!"

"No, like a good husband. The princess is no doubt wearied enough; she will be weeping in her plate, and her eyes will get quite red. A husband who is the cause of his wife's eyes getting red is an odious creature. Come, Monseigneur, come!"

"I cannot, for I have directed dinner to be served here."

"Yet see, Monseigneur, how dull we shall be! I shall have a heavy heart because I know that Madame will be alone; you, hard and savage as you wish to appear, will be sighing all the while. Take me with you to Madame's dinner, and that will be a delightful surprise. I am sure we shall be very merry. You were wrong this morning."

"Well, perhaps I was."

"There is no perhaps at all, for it is a fact."

"Chevalier, Chevalier, your advice is not good."

"Nay, my advice is good; all the advantages are on your own side. Your violet-colored suit embroidered with gold becomes you admirably. Madame will be still

more overcome by the man than by this handsome conduct. Come, Monseigneur!"

"You decide me; let us go."

The duke left his room, accompanied by the chevalier, and went towards Madame's apartments. The chevalier hastily whispered to his valet, "Be sure that there are some people before the little door, so that no one can escape in that direction. Run, run!" and he followed the duke to the antechambers of Madame's suite of apartments; and when the ushers were about to announce them, the chevalier said, laughing, "Do not stir; his Highness wishes to give a surprise."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MONSIEUR IS JEALOUS OF DE GUICHE.

Monsieur entered the room abruptly, as those persons enter who mean well and think they confer pleasure, or as those do who hope to surprise some secret, — the melancholy boon of jealous people. Madame, intoxicated by the first bars of the music, was dancing in the most unrestrained manner, leaving unfinished the dinner which she had begun. Her partner was M. de Guiche, who with his arms raised and his eyes half closed was kneeling on one knee, like the Spanish dancers, with eyes full of passion and with caressing gestures. The princess was dancing round him with a responsive smile and the same alluring seductiveness. Montalais stood by admiringly; La Vallière, seated in a corner of the room, looked on thoughtfully.

It is impossible to describe the effect which the presence of Monsieur produced upon this happy company, and it would be just as impossible to describe the effect which the sight of their happiness produced upon Philip. The Comte de Guiche had no power to move. Madame remained in the middle of one of the figures, in a suspended attitude, unable to utter a word. The Chevalier de Lorraine, leaning back against the door-frame, smiled like a man in the very height of the frankest admiration. The pallor of the prince and the convulsive trembling of his hands and limbs were the first symptoms that struck those present. A dead silence succeeded the sound of the

dance. The Chevalier de Lorraine took advantage of this interval to salute Madame and De Guiche respectively, affecting to include them both in his reverences, as though they were the master and mistress of the house.

Monsieur then approached them, saying in a hoarse tone, "I am delighted. I came here expecting to find you ill and low-spirited, and I see you occupied in new amusements. Really, it is most fortunate. My house is the merriest in the world." Then, turning towards De Guiche, "Count," he said, "I did not know you were so good a dancer." And again addressing his wife, he said, with a bitterness of expression which disguised his wrath, "Show a little more consideration for me, Madame! Whenever you intend to amuse yourselves here, invite me; I am a prince very much neglected."

De Guiche had now recovered his self-possession; and with the spirited boldness which was natural to him and which so well became him, he said, "Your Highness knows very well that my very life is at your service, and whenever there is a question of its being needed, I am ready; but to-day, as it is only a question of dancing to music, I dance."

"And you are perfectly right," said the prince, coldly. "But, Madame," he continued, "you do not observe that your ladies deprive me of my friends? M. de Guiche does not belong to you, Madame, but to me. If you wish to dine without me, you have your ladies; when I dine without you, I have my gentlemen. Do not rob me of everything."

Madame felt the reproach and the lesson, and the color rushed to her face. "Monsieur," she replied, "I was not aware, when I came to the Court of France, that princesses of my rank were to be regarded as the women in Turkey are, — I was not aware that we were not allowed

to see men; but since such is your desire, I will conform to it. Pray do not hesitate, if you should wish it, to have my windows barred."

This repartee, which made Montalais and De Guiche smile, rekindled the prince's anger, no inconsiderable portion of which had already evaporated in words.

"Very well," he said, in a concentrated tone of voice, "this is the way in which I am respected in my own house."

"Monseigneur, Monseigneur!" murmured the chevalier in Monsieur's ear, in such a manner that every one could observe that he was endeavoring to calm him.

"Come!" replied the duke, as his only answer, hurrying him away, and turning round with so hasty a movement that he almost ran against Madame.

The chevalier followed his master to his own apartment, where the prince was no sooner seated than he gave free rein to his fury. The chevalier raised his eyes to the ceiling, clasped his hands together, and said not a word.

"Give me your opinion!" exclaimed the prince.

"Upon what, Monseigneur?"

"Upon all that is taking place here."

"Oh, Monseigneur, it is a very serious matter!"

"It is abominable! I cannot live in this manner."

"How unhappy all this is!" said the chevalier. "We hoped to enjoy tranquillity after that madman Buckingham had left."

"And this is worse."

"I do not say that, Monseigneur."

"Yes; but I say it, for Buckingham would never have ventured upon a fourth part of what we have just now seen."

"What do you mean?"

"To conceal one's self for the purpose of dancing, and to feign indisposition in order to dine *tête-à-tête*."

"Oh, no, no, Monseigneur!"

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the prince, exciting himself like a self-willed child; "but I will not endure it any longer, I must know what is going on."

"Monseigneur, an exposure —"

"By Heaven, Monsieur, am I to restrain myself when people show so little consideration for me? Wait for me here, Chevalier, wait for me here!" The prince disappeared in the next room, and inquired of the gentleman in attendance if the queen-mother had returned from chapel.

Anne of Austria felt that her happiness was now complete. Peace restored to her family, and the nation delighted with the presence of a young monarch who promised a grand administration; the revenues of the State increased; external peace assured, — everything seemed to presage a tranquil future for her. Her thoughts recurred now and then to that poor young man whom she had received as a mother and had driven away as a hard-hearted stepmother, and she sighed as she thought of him.

Suddenly the Duc d'Orléans entered her room. "Dear mother," he exclaimed, closing the doors hurriedly, "things cannot go on as they now are."

Anne of Austria raised her beautiful eyes towards him, and with an unmoved gentleness of manner said, "To what things do you allude?"

"I wish to speak of Madame."

"Your wife?"

"Yes, mother."

"I suppose that silly fellow Buckingham has been writing a farewell letter to her."

"Oh, yes, Madame; of course, it is a question of Buckingham!"

"Of whom else could it be, then? — for that poor fellow was, wrongly enough, the object of your jealousy, and I thought — "

"My wife, Madame, has already replaced the Duke of Buckingham."

"Philip, what are you saying? You are speaking very heedlessly."

"No, no. Madame has done so well that I am still jealous."

"Of whom, in Heaven's name?"

"Is it possible that you have not remarked it? Have you not noticed that M. de Guiche is always in her apartments, always with her?"

The queen clapped her hands together and began to laugh. "Philip," she said, "your jealousy is not merely a defect, it is a positive disease."

"Whether a defect or a disease, Madame, I suffer from it."

"And do you imagine that a complaint which exists only in your own imagination can be cured? You wish it to be said that you are right in being jealous, when there is no ground whatever for your jealousy."

"Of course you will begin to say for this one what you said for the other."

"Because, my son," said the queen, dryly, "what you did for the other, you are beginning again for this one."

The prince bowed, slightly annoyed. "If I give you facts," he said, "will you believe me?"

"If it regarded anything else but jealousy, my son, I would believe you without your alleging facts; but as jealousy is in the case, I promise you nothing."

"Then this is just the same as if your Majesty were to order me to hold my tongue, and sent me away unheard."

"Far from it; as you are my son, I owe you a mother's indulgence."

"Oh, say what you think, — you owe me as much indulgence as a madman deserves."

"Do not exaggerate, Philip, and take care how you represent your wife to me as a woman of a depraved mind —"

"But facts, mother, facts!"

"Well, I am listening."

"This morning, at ten o'clock, they were playing music in Madame's apartments."

"No harm in that, surely."

"M. de Guiche was talking with her alone — Ah! I forgot to tell you that for a week he has haunted her like a shadow."

"If they were doing any harm, they would hide themselves."

"Very good," exclaimed the duke, "I expected you to say that. Pray, do not forget what you have just said. This morning, I say, I took them by surprise, and showed my dissatisfaction in a very marked manner."

"Rely upon it, that is quite sufficient; it was, perhaps, even a little too much. These young women easily take offence. To reproach them for an error they have not committed is sometimes almost the same as telling them they may do it."

"Very good, very good; but wait a minute. Do not forget what you have just this minute said, Madame, that this morning's lesson ought to have been sufficient, and that if they had been doing what was wrong, they would have concealed themselves."

"Yes, I said so."

"Well, just now, repenting of my hastiness of this morning and supposing that Guiche was sulking in his

own apartments, I went to pay Madame a visit. Can you guess what or whom I found there? Another band of musicians, dancing, and Guiche himself, — he was concealed there."

Anne of Austria frowned. "It was imprudent," she said. "What did Madame say?"

"Nothing."

"And Guiche?"

"As much — oh, no! he stammered forth some impertinences."

"Well, what is your opinion, Philip?"

"That I have been made a fool of; that Buckingham was only a pretext, and that the true culprit is Guiche."

Anne shrugged her shoulders. "Well," she said, "what else?"

"I wish De Guiche to be dismissed from my household, as Buckingham was; and I shall ask the king, unless —"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you, Madame, who are so clever and so kind, will execute the commission yourself."

"I shall not do it."

"What, Madame!"

"Listen, Philip! I am not disposed to pay people ill compliments every day; I have some influence over young people, but I cannot take advantage of it without risk of losing it altogether. Besides, there is nothing to prove that M. de Guiche is guilty."

"He has displeased me."

"That is your own affair."

"Very well, I know what I shall do," said the prince, impetuously.

Anne looked at him with some uneasiness. "What will you do?" she said.

"I will have him drowned in my reservoir the next time I find him in my apartments again."

Having launched this terrible threat, the prince expected that his mother would be frightened out of her senses; but the queen was unmoved by it. "Do so," she said.

Philip was as weak as a woman, and began to cry out, "Every one betrays me, no one cares for me; my mother even joins my enemies."

"Your mother sees further in the matter than you do, and does not care about advising you, since you do not listen to her."

"I will go to the king."

"I was about to propose that to you. I am now expecting his Majesty here, — it is the hour he usually pays me a visit; explain the matter to him yourself."

She had hardly finished when Philip heard the door of the anteroom open with some noise. He began to feel nervous. At the sound of the king's footsteps, which could be heard upon the carpet, the duke hurriedly made his escape by a small door, leaving the ground to the queen.

Anne of Austria began to laugh, and was laughing still when the king entered. He came very affectionately to inquire after the even now uncertain health of the queen-mother, and to announce to her that the preparations for the journey to Fontainebleau were completed. Seeing her laugh, his uneasiness on her account diminished, and he addressed her in a laughing tone himself. Anne of Austria took him by the hand, and in a voice full of playfulness, said, "Do you know that I am proud of being a Spanish woman?"

"Why, Madame?"

"Because Spanish women are worth more than English women at least."

"Explain yourself."

"Since your marriage you have not, I believe, had a single reproach to make against the queen."

"Certainly not."

"And you, too, have been married some time. Your brother, on the contrary, has been married only a fortnight."

"Well?"

"He is now finding fault with Madame a second time."

"What! Buckingham still?"

"No, another."

"Who?"

"De Guiche."

"Really, Madame is a coquette, then?"

"I fear so."

"My poor brother," said the king, laughing.

"You do not mind coquetry, it seems?"

"In Madame certainly I do; but Madame is not a coquette at heart."

"That may be, but your brother is excessively angry about it."

"What does he want?"

"He wishes to drown De Guiche."

"That is a violent measure to resort to."

"Do not laugh! he is extremely irritated. Think of what can be done."

"To save De Guiche? — certainly."

"Oh, if your brother heard you, he would conspire against you as your uncle Monsieur did against the king your father."

"No; Philip has too much affection for me for that, and I on my side have too great a regard for him. We shall live together on very good terms. But what is the substance of his request?"

"That you will prevent Madame from being a coquette, and De Guiche from being agreeable."

"Is that all? My brother has an exalted idea of the royal power. To reform a woman, to say nothing of reforming a man!"

"How will you set about it?"

"With a word to De Guiche, who is a clever fellow, I will undertake to convince him."

"But Madame?"

"That is more difficult; a word will not be enough. I will compose a homily and preach it to her."

"There is no time to be lost."

"Oh, I will use the utmost diligence. There is a repetition of the ballet after dinner."

"You will read her a lecture while you are dancing?"

"Yes, Madame."

"You promise to convert her?"

"I will root out the heresy altogether, either by convincing her or by extreme measures."

"That is all right, then. Do not mix me up in the affair. Madame would never forgive me in her life; and as a mother-in-law, I ought to try to live on good terms with my daughter-in-law."

"The king, Madame, will take all upon himself. But let me reflect."

"What about?"

"It would be better, perhaps, if I were to go and see Madame in her own apartment."

"Would not that seem a somewhat serious step to take?"

"Yes; but seriousness is not unbecoming in preachers, and the music of the ballet would drown one half of my arguments. Besides, the object is to prevent any violent measures on my brother's part, so that a little

precipitation may be advisable. Is Madame in her own apartment?"

"I believe so."

"Of what is my statement of grievances to consist?"

"In a few words, of the following: music uninterruptedly; De Guiche's assiduity; suspicions of treasonable plots and practices."

"And the proofs?"

"There are none."

"Very well; I shall go at once to see Madame." The king turned to look in the mirrors at his costume, which was very rich, and at his face, which was as radiant and sparkling as diamonds. "I suppose my brother is kept a little at a distance," he said.

"Oh, fire and water cannot possibly be more uncongenial!"

"That will do. Permit me, Madame, to kiss your hands, — the most beautiful hands in France."

"May you be successful, Sire, — may you be the family peacemaker!"

"I do not employ an ambassador," replied Louis, — "which is as much as to say that I shall succeed." He went out laughing, and carefully brushed his dress as he went along.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MEDIATOR.

When the king made his appearance in Madame's apartment, the courtiers, whom the news of a conjugal scene had dispersed in the various rooms, began to entertain the most serious apprehensions. A storm, too, was brewing in that direction, the elements of which the Chevalier de Lorraine, in the midst of the different groups, was analyzing with delight, magnifying the weaker, and acting, according to his own wicked designs, in such a manner with regard to the stronger as to produce the most disastrous consequences possible. As Anne of Austria had said, the presence of the king gave a serious character to the event. Indeed, in the year 1662 the dissatisfaction of Monsieur with Madame, and the king's intervention in the private affairs of Monsieur, were matters of no inconsiderable moment.

Therefore the boldest, even, of the associates of the Comte de Guiche had been seen from the first moment to hold aloof from him with a sort of fright; and the count himself, infected by the general panic, retired to his own apartments alone. The king entered Madame's private apartment, acknowledging and returning the salutations, as he was always in the habit of doing. The ladies of honor were ranged in a line on his passage along the gallery. Although his Majesty was very much preoccupied, he gave the glance of a master at the two rows of young and beautiful girls, who modestly cast

down their eyes, blushing as they felt the king's gaze upon them. One only of the number, whose long hair fell in silken ringlets upon the most beautiful skin imaginable, — one only was pale, and could hardly sustain herself, notwithstanding the hints which her companion gave her with her elbow. It was La Vallière, whom Montalais supported in that manner by whispering some of that courage to her with which she herself was so abundantly provided. The king could not resist turning round to look at them again. Their faces, which had already been raised, were again lowered; but the only fair head among them remained motionless, as if all her remaining strength and intelligence had abandoned her.

When he entered Madame's room, Louis found his sister-in-law reclining upon the cushions of her boudoir. She rose and made a profound reverence, murmuring some words of thanks for the honor she was receiving. She then resumed her seat, overcome by a sudden weakness, — which was no doubt assumed, for a delightful color animated her cheeks, while her eyes, still red from a few tears she had recently shed, never had more fire in them. When the king was seated, and as soon as he had remarked, with that accuracy of observation which characterized him, the disorder of the room and the no less great disorder of Madame's countenance, he assumed a playful manner, saying, "My dear sister, at what hour to-day do you wish the repetition of the ballet to take place?"

Madame, shaking her charming head, slowly and languishingly said: "Ah! Sire, will you graciously excuse my appearance at the repetition? I was about to send to inform your Majesty that I could not attend to-day."

"Indeed!" said the king, in apparent surprise; "are you not well, Sister?"

"No, Sire."

"I will summon your medical attendants, then."

"No, for they can do nothing for my indisposition."

"You alarm me."

"Sire, I wish to ask your Majesty's permission to return to England."

The king started. "Return to England!" he said; "do you really say what you mean, Madame?"

"I say it reluctantly, Sire," replied the granddaughter of Henry IV. firmly, her beautiful black eyes flashing. "I regret to have to confide such matters to your Majesty; but I feel myself too unhappy at your Majesty's court, and I wish to return to my own family."

"Madame, Madame!" exclaimed the king, approaching her.

"Listen to me, Sire!" continued the young woman, acquiring by degrees that ascendency over her interrogator which her beauty and her energetic nature conferred. "I am accustomed to suffering; young as I am, I have already suffered humiliation and have endured disdain. Oh, do not contradict me, Sire!" she said, with a smile. The king colored. "Then," she continued, "I have come to believe that God had called me into existence with that object, — me, the daughter of a powerful monarch; but since he could strike at the life of my father, he might well strike at pride in me. I have suffered greatly; I have been the cause, too, of my mother's suffering much; but I have sworn that if Providence should ever place me in a position of independence, even were it that of a workwoman of the lower classes who gains her bread by her labor, I would never suffer humiliation again. That day has now arrived: I have been restored to the fortune due to my rank and to my birth; I have ascended again the steps of a throne; and I thought that in

allying myself with a French prince, I should find in him a relative, a friend, an equal; but I perceive that I have found only a master, and I rebel, Sire. My mother shall know nothing of it; you whom I respect, and whom I — love — " The king started; never had any voice so gratified his ear. " You, Sire, I say, — who know all, since you have come here, — you will, perhaps, understand me. If you had not come, I should have gone to you. I wish for permission to depart without restraint. I leave it to your delicacy of feeling — to you, a man *par excellence* — to exculpate and to protect me."

" My dear sister," murmured the king, overpowered by this bold attack, " have you well reflected upon the enormous difficulty of the project you have conceived?"

" Sire, I do not reflect, I feel. Attacked, I instinctively repel the attack; that is all."

" Come, tell me, what have they done to you?" said the king.

The princess, it will have been seen, by this peculiarly feminine manœuvre had escaped every reproach, and advanced on her side a far more serious one; from an accused, she became the accuser. It is an infallible sign of guilt; but from this palpable fault all women, even the least clever of the sex, invariably know how to derive some means of attaining success. The king had forgotten that he had paid her a visit in order to say to her, " What have you done to my brother?" and that he was reduced to saying to her, " What have they done to you?"

" What have they done to me?" replied Madame; " oh, one must be a woman to understand it, Sire! — they have made me weep;" and with a finger whose slenderness and pearly whiteness were unequalled, she pointed to her brilliant eyes swimming in tears, and again began to weep.

"I implore you, my dear sister," said the king, advancing to take her warm and throbbing hand, which she surrendered to him.

"In the first place, Sire, I was deprived of the presence of my brother's friend. The Duke of Buckingham was to me an agreeable, cheerful visitor, my own countryman, who knew my habits, — I will say almost a companion, so accustomed had we been to pass our days together, with our other friends, upon the beautiful piece of water at St. James's."

"But, my sister, Villiers was in love with you."

"A pretext! What does it matter," she said seriously, "whether the Duke of Buckingham was in love with me or not? Is a man in love so very dangerous for me? Ah, Sire, it is not sufficient for a man to love a woman;" and she smiled so tenderly and with so much archness that the king felt his heart beat and throb within his breast.

"At all events, if my brother were jealous?" interrupted the king.

"Very well, I admit that is a reason; and the Duke of Buckingham was sent away accordingly."

"No, not sent away."

"Driven away, expelled, dismissed, then, if you prefer it, Sire. One of the first gentlemen of Europe was obliged to leave the Court of the King of France, of Louis XIV., like a beggar, on account of a glance or a bouquet. It was little worthy of this most gallant court. But forgive me, Sire; I forgot that, in speaking thus, I am attacking your sovereign power."

"I assure you, my dear sister, it was not I who dismissed the Duke of Buckingham; I was very much charmed with him."

"It was not you?" said Madame, cleverly; "ah, so

much the better!" and she emphasized the "so much the better" as if she had instead said, "so much the worse."

A few minutes' silence ensued. Madame then resumed: "The Duke of Buckingham having left, — I now know why and by whose means, — I thought I should have recovered my tranquillity; but not at all, for all at once Monsieur finds another pretext, all at once — "

"All at once," said the king, playfully, "some one else presents himself. It is but natural; you are beautiful, Madame, and men will always love you."

"In that case," exclaimed the princess, "I shall create a solitude around me, — which indeed seems to be what is wished, and what is being prepared for me; but no, I prefer to return to London. There I am known and appreciated; I shall have friends without fearing that they may be regarded as my lovers. Shame! it is a disgraceful suspicion, and unworthy a gentleman. Monsieur has lost everything in my estimation, since he has shown me that he can be the tyrant of a woman."

"Nay, nay; my brother's only fault is that of loving you."

"Love me! Monsieur love me! Ah, Sire," and she burst out laughing, "Monsieur will never love any woman," she said; "Monsieur loves himself too much. No, unhappily for me, Monsieur's jealousy is of the worst kind, — he is jealous without love."

"Confess, however," said the king, who began to be excited by this varied and animated conversation, — "confess that De Guiche loves you."

"Ah, Sire, I know nothing about that."

"You must have perceived it; a man who loves betrays himself."

"M. de Guiche has not betrayed himself."

"My dear sister, you are defending M. de Guiche."

"I, indeed! Ah, Sire, I only needed a suspicion from yourself to complete my wretchedness."

"No, Madame, no," returned the king, hurriedly; "do not distress yourself, — nay, you are weeping. Calm yourself, I implore you!"

She wept, however, and large tears fell upon her hands. The king took one of her hands in his, and kissed the tears away. She looked at him so sadly and with so much tenderness that his heart was melted.

"You have no feeling, then, for De Guiche?" he said, more disturbed than became his character of mediator.

"None, absolutely none."

"Then I can reassure my brother in that respect?"

"Nothing will satisfy him, Sire. Do not believe that he is jealous. Monsieur has been badly advised by some one, and he is of an uneasy disposition."

"He may well be so when you are concerned," said the king.

Madame cast down her eyes, and was silent; the king did so likewise, holding her hand all the while. His momentary silence seemed to last an age. Madame gently withdrew her hand, and from that moment she felt that her triumph was certain, and that the field of battle was her own.

"Monsieur complains," said the king, diffidently, "that you prefer the society of private individuals to his own conversation and society."

"Sire, Monsieur passes his life in looking at his face in the glass, and in plotting with the Chevalier de Lorraine all sorts of spiteful things against women."

"Oh, you are going somewhat too far!"

"I only say what is the fact. Do you observe for yourself, Sire, and you will see that I am right."

"I will observe; but in the mean time what satisfaction can I give my brother?"

"My departure."

"You repeat that word!" exclaimed the king, imprudently, as if during the last ten minutes such a change had been produced that Madame would have had all her ideas on the subject thoroughly changed.

"Sire, I cannot be happy here any longer," she said. "M. de Guiche annoys Monsieur; will he be sent away too?"

"If it be necessary, why not?" replied Louis XIV., smiling.

"Well, and after M. de Guiche, — whom, by the by, I shall regret, I warn you, Sire."

"Ah, you will regret him?"

"Certainly; he is agreeable, he has a great friendship for me, and he amuses me."

"Ah, if Monsieur were only to hear you," said the king, nettled, "do you know, I would not undertake to make it up again between you; nay, I would not even attempt it."

"Sire, can you even now prevent Monsieur from being jealous of the first comer? I know very well that M. de Guiche is not the first."

"Again I warn you that, as a good brother, I shall take a dislike to M. de Guiche."

"Ah, Sire," said Madame, "do not, I entreat you, adopt either the sympathies or the dislikes of Monsieur! Remain the king; it will be far better for yourself and for every one else."

"You jest most charmingly, Madame; and I can well understand how even those whom you attack must adore you."

"And is that the reason why you, Sire, whom I had

regarded as my defender, are about to join those who persecute me?" said Madame.

"I your persecutor! Heaven forbid!"

"Then," she continued languishingly, "grant me my request."

"What do you wish?"

"To return to England."

"Never, never!" exclaimed Louis XIV.

"I am a prisoner, then?"

"In France, yes."

"What must I do, then?"

"I will tell you, my sister. Instead of devoting yourself to friendships which are somewhat unsuitable, instead of alarming us by your retirement, remain always in our society, — do not leave us, let us live as a united family. M. de Guiche is certainly very agreeable; but if at least we do not possess his wit —"

"Ah, Sire, you know very well that you are pretending to be modest."

"No, I swear to you. One may be a king, and yet feel that he possesses fewer chances of pleasing than many other gentlemen."

"I am sure, Sire, that you do not believe a single word you are saying."

The king looked at Madame tenderly, and said, "Will you promise me one thing?"

"What is it?"

"That you will no longer waste upon strangers in your boudoir the time which you owe us. Shall we make an offensive and defensive alliance against the common enemy?"

"An alliance? With you, Sire?"

"Why not? Are you not a sovereign power?"

"But are you, Sire, a very faithful ally?"

"You shall see, Madame."

"And when shall this alliance begin?"

"This very day."

"I will draw up the treaty, and you shall sign it."

"Blindly."

"Then, Sire, I promise you wonders; you are the star of the court, and when you make your appearance everything will be resplendent."

"Oh, Madame, Madame," said Louis XIV., "you know well that there is no brilliancy which does not proceed from yourself, and that if I assume the sun as my device, it is only an emblem."

"Sire, you flatter your ally,—therefore you wish to deceive her," said Madame, threatening the king with her roguish finger.

"What! you believe that I am deceiving you, when I assure you of my affection?"

"Yes."

"What makes you so suspicious?"

"One thing."

"What is it? I shall indeed be unhappy if I do not overcome one single thing."

"That one thing in question, Sire, is not in your power, not even in the power of Heaven."

"Tell me what it is."

"The past."

"I do not understand, Madame," said the king, precisely because he had understood her but too well.

The princess took his hand in hers. "Sire," she said, "I have had the misfortune to displease you for so long a period that I have almost the right to ask myself to-day why you were able to accept me as a sister-in-law."

"Displease me! You have displeased me?"

"Nay, do not deny it, for I remember it well."

"Our alliance shall date from to-day," exclaimed the king, with a warmth that was not assumed. "You will not think any more of the past, will you? I myself am resolved that I will not. I shall always remember the present; I have it before my eyes, — look!" and he led the princess before a mirror, in which she saw herself reflected, blushing and beautiful enough to overcome a saint.

"It is all the same," she murmured; "it will not be a very strong alliance."

"Must I swear?" inquired the king, intoxicated by the voluptuous turn the whole conversation had taken.

"Oh, I do not refuse a good oath," said Madame; "it has always the semblance of security."

The king knelt upon a footstool, and took hold of Madame's hand. She, with a smile which a painter could not render and which a poet only could imagine, gave him both her hands, in which he hid his burning face. Neither of them could utter a syllable. The king felt Madame withdraw her hands, caressing his face while she did so. He rose immediately and left the apartment. The courtiers remarked his heightened color, and concluded that the scene had been a stormy one. The Chevalier de Lorraine, however, hastened to say, "Nay, be comforted, Messieurs! his Majesty is always pale when he is angry."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ADVISERS.

THE king left Madame in a state of agitation which it would have been difficult even for himself to have explained. It is impossible, in fact, to explain the secret play of those strange sympathies which suddenly and apparently without any cause are excited, after many years passed in the greatest calmness and indifference, by two hearts destined to love each other. Why had Louis formerly disdained, almost hated, Madame? Why did he now find the same woman so beautiful, so captivating; and why were his thoughts not only occupied, but still more why were they so occupied about her? Why, in fact, had Madame, whose eyes and mind were sought for in another direction, shown during the last week towards the king a semblance of favor which might encourage a hope of greater intimacy?

It must not be supposed that Louis proposed to himself any plan of seduction. The tie which united Madame to his brother was, or at least would seem to him, an insuperable barrier; he was even too far removed from that barrier to perceive its existence. But on the downward path of those passions in which the heart rejoices, towards which youth impels us, no one can say where he will stop, — not even he who has in advance calculated all the chances of success or failure. As for Madame, her regard for the king may easily be explained; she was young, a coquette, and ardently fond of inspiring

admiration. Hers was one of those buoyant, impetuous natures, which upon a stage would pass through coals of fire to obtain applause from the spectators. It was not surprising, then, that by a sort of progression, after having been adored by Buckingham and by De Guiche, who was superior to Buckingham, — even if it were only from that great merit so much appreciated by women, that is to say, novelty, — it was not surprising, then, we say, that the princess should raise her ambition to being admired by the king, who not only was the first person in the realm, but was one of the handsomest and wittiest men in it.

As for the sudden passion with which Louis was inspired for his sister-in-law, physiology would perhaps supply the explanation of it by some hackneyed commonplace reasons, and Nature from some of her mysterious affinities. Madame had the most beautiful black eyes in the world; Louis, eyes as beautiful, but blue. Madame was laughter-loving and unreserved in her manners; Louis, melancholy and discreet. Summoned to meet each other for the first time upon the grounds of interest and a common curiosity, these two opposite natures were mutually influenced by the contact of their reciprocal contradictions of character. Louis, when he returned to his own rooms, acknowledged to himself that Madame was the most bewitching woman of his court. Madame, left alone, delightedly thought that she had made a great impression on the king. This feeling with her, however, must remain passive, while the king could not but act with all the natural vehemence of the heated fancies of a young man, and of a young man who has but to express a wish and it is executed.

The first thing the king did was to announce to Monsieur that everything was quietly arranged, — that Madame

had the greatest respect, the sincerest affection for him; but that she was of a proud and sensitive character, and that her susceptibilities were so acute as to require very careful management.

Monsieur replied, in the half-sour tone of voice which he generally adopted with his brother, that he could not very well understand the susceptibilities of a woman whose conduct might, in his opinion, expose her to censorious remarks; and that if any one had a right to feel wounded, it was he, Monsieur himself, to whom that right incontestably belonged.

To this the king replied in a sharp tone of voice, which showed the interest he took in his sister-in-law, "Thank Heaven, Madame is above censure."

"The censure of others certainly, I admit," said Monsieur; "but not above mine, I presume."

"Well," said the king, "all I have to say, brother, is that Madame's conduct does not deserve your censure. She certainly is heedless and peculiar in her ways, but professes the best feelings. The English character is not always well understood in France, and the liberty of English manners sometimes surprises those who do not know the extent to which this liberty is due to innocence."

"Ah!" said Monsieur, more and more piqued, "from the very moment when your Majesty absolves my wife, whom I accuse, my wife is not guilty, and I have nothing more to say."

"My brother," replied the king, hastily, for he felt the voice of conscience murmuring softly in his heart that Monsieur was not altogether wrong, "what I have said, and, above all, what I have done, was only for your happiness. I was told that you complained of a want of confidence or attention on Madame's part, and I did not

wish your uneasiness to be prolonged any further. It is part of my duty to watch over your household, as over that of the humblest of my subjects. I have seen, therefore, with the sincerest pleasure, that your apprehensions have no foundation."

"And," continued Monsieur, in an inquiring tone, and fixing his eyes upon his brother, "what your Majesty has discovered for Madame, — and I bow myself to your royal wisdom, — have you also verified it for those who have been the cause of the scandal of which I complain?"

"You are right, brother," said the king; "I will consider that point."

These words comprised an order as well as a consolation; the prince felt it to be so, and withdrew. As for Louis, he went to seek his mother again; for he felt that he had need of a more complete absolution than that which he had just received from his brother. Anne of Austria did not entertain for M. de Guiche the same reasons for indulgence that she had had for Buckingham. She perceived, at the very first words he pronounced, that Louis was not disposed to be severe, and she became so. It was one of the usual stratagems of the good queen, in order to succeed in ascertaining the truth. But Louis was no longer in his apprenticeship; already for more than a year past he had been king, and during that year he had had time to learn how to dissemble. Listening to Anne of Austria in order to permit her to disclose her own thoughts, testifying his approval only by look and by gesture, he became convinced, from certain profound glances and certain skilful insinuations, that the queen, so clear-sighted in matters of gallantry, had, if not guessed, at least suspected, his weakness for Madame. Of all his auxiliaries, Anne of Austria would be the most important to secure; of all his enemies, Anne of Austria

would be the most dangerous. Louis therefore changed his manœuvres. He complained of Madame; absolved Monsieur; listened to what his mother had to say of De Guiche, as he had previously listened to what she had had to say of Buckingham; and then, when he saw that she thought she had gained a complete victory over him, he left her.

The whole of the court, that is to say, all the favorites and more intimate associates, — and they were numerous, since there were already five masters, — were assembled in the evening for the repetition of the ballet. This interval had been occupied by poor De Guiche in receiving sundry visits. Among the number was one which he hoped for and feared to nearly an equal extent. It was that of the Chevalier de Lorraine. About three o'clock in the afternoon the chevalier entered De Guiche's rooms. His looks were most assuring. Monsieur, he said to De Guiche, was in an excellent humor, and no one could say that the slightest cloud had passed across the conjugal sky. Besides, Monsieur was not one to bear ill-will.

For a very long time past, during his residence at the court, the Chevalier de Lorraine had decided that of the two sons of Louis XIII. Monsieur was the one who had inherited the father's character, — an uncertain, irresolute character, impulsively good, evilly disposed at bottom, but certainly a cipher for his friends. He had especially cheered De Guiche by pointing out to him that Madame would before long succeed in governing her husband, and that consequently that man would govern Monsieur who should succeed in influencing Madame.

To this, De Guiche, full of mistrust and presence of mind, had replied, "Yes, Chevalier; but I believe Madame to be a very dangerous person."

"In what respect?"

"In that she has perceived that Monsieur is not very passionately inclined towards women."

"Quite true," said the Chevalier de Lorraine, laughing.

"In that case Madame will choose the first one who approaches, in order to make him the object of her preference, and to bring back her husband by jealousy."

"Deep! deep!" exclaimed the chevalier.

"But true!" replied De Guiche.

But neither the one nor the other expressed his real thought. De Guiche, at the very moment when he thus attacked Madame's character, mentally asked her forgiveness from the bottom of his heart; the chevalier, while admiring De Guiche's penetration, led him blindfolded to the brink of the precipice. De Guiche then questioned him more directly upon the effect produced by the scene of the morning, and upon the still more serious effect produced by the scene at dinner.

"But I have already told you that they are all laughing at it," replied the Chevalier de Lorraine; "and Monsieur himself, first of all."

"Yet," hazarded De Guiche, "I have heard that the king paid Madame a visit."

"Yes, precisely so. Madame was the only one who did not laugh, and the king went to her in order to make her laugh too."

"So that —"

"So that nothing is altered in the arrangements of the day."

"And is there a repetition of the ballet this evening?"

"Certainly."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite so," returned the chevalier.

At this moment of the conversation between the two

young men, Raoul entered, looking full of anxiety. As soon as the chevalier — who had a secret dislike for him, as for every other noble character — perceived him enter, he rose from his seat.

"What do you advise me to do, then?" inquired De Guiche of the chevalier.

"I advise you to go to sleep with perfect tranquillity, my dear count."

"And my advice, De Guiche," said Raoul, "would be the very opposite."

"What is that?"

"To mount your horse and set off at once for one of your estates. On your arrival, follow the chevalier's advice, if you like; and what is more, you can sleep there as long and as tranquilly as may be agreeable to you."

"What! go away?" exclaimed the chevalier, feigning surprise; "why should De Guiche go away?"

"Because — and you particularly cannot be ignorant of it — because every one is talking about the scene which has passed between Monsieur and De Guiche."

De Guiche turned pale.

"Not at all," replied the chevalier, "not at all; and you have been wrongly informed, M. de Bragelonne."

"I have been perfectly well informed, on the contrary, Monsieur," replied Raoul; "and the advice I give De Guiche is that of a friend."

During this discussion De Guiche, somewhat shaken, looked alternately first at one and then at the other of his advisers. He inwardly felt that a game important in all its consequences for the rest of his life was being played at that moment.

"Is it not the fact," said the chevalier, putting the question to the count himself, — "is it not the fact, De

Guiche, that the scene was not so stormy as M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne seems to think? Moreover, he was not himself there."

"Monsieur," persisted Raoul, "stormy or not, it is not precisely of the scene itself that I am speaking, but of the consequences that may ensue. I know that Monsieur has threatened, and I know that Madame has been in tears."

"Madame in tears!" exclaimed De Guiche, imprudently clasping his hands.

"Ah, indeed!" said the chevalier, laughing, "this is indeed a circumstance with which I was not acquainted. You are decidedly better informed than I am, M. de Bragelonne."

"And it is precisely because I am better informed than yourself, Chevalier, that I insist upon De Guiche's leaving."

"No, no, once more I regret to differ from you, Monsieur the Viscount; but his departure is unnecessary. Why, indeed, should he leave? Tell us why!"

"The king!"

"The king!" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Yes; I tell you the king has taken up the affair."

"Bah!" said the chevalier; "the king likes De Guiche, and particularly his father. Reflect that if the count were to leave, it would be an admission that he had done something which merited rebuke."

"Why so?"

"No doubt of it; when one runs away, it is either from guilt or from fear."

"Or because a man is offended because he is wrongfully accused," said Bragelonne. "We will assign as a reason for his departure that he feels hurt and injured, — nothing will be easier; we will say that we both did our ut-

most to keep him, and you at least will not be telling an untruth. Come, De Guiche, you are innocent; and being so, the scene of to-day must have wounded you. So set off, De Guiche! be off!"

"No, De Guiche, remain where you are," said the chevalier,—"precisely as M. de Bragelonne has put it, because you are innocent. Once more, forgive me, Viscount; but my opinion is the very opposite to your own."

"And you are at perfect liberty to maintain it, Monsieur; but observe that the exile which De Guiche will voluntarily impose upon himself will be of short duration. He can terminate it whenever he pleases, and returning from his voluntary exile, he will meet with smiles from all lips; while, on the contrary, the anger of the king may draw down a storm upon his head, the end of which no one can foresee."

The chevalier smiled, and murmured to himself, "*Pardieu!* that is the very thing I wish;" and at the same time he shrugged his shoulders, — a movement which did not escape the count, who dreaded, if he left the court, to seem to yield to a feeling of fear.

"No, no; I have decided," he exclaimed. "Bragelonne, I stay."

"I prophesy, then," said Raoul, sadly, "that misfortune will befall you, De Guiche."

"I, too, am a prophet, but not a prophet of evil; on the contrary, Count, I say to you remain."

"Are you sure," inquired De Guiche, "that the repetition of the ballet still takes place?"

"Quite sure."

"Well, you see, Raoul," continued De Guiche, endeavoring to smile, "you see that the court is not so very sorrowful, or so readily disposed to internal dissensions, when

dancing is carried on with such assiduity. Come, acknowledge that," said the count to Raoul, who shook his head, replying, —

"I have nothing further to say."

"But really," inquired the chevalier, curious to learn from what source Raoul had obtained his information, the exactitude of which he was inwardly forced to admit, "you say you are well informed, Monsieur the Viscount. How can you be better informed than myself, who am one of the prince's most intimate companions?"

"Monsieur," said Raoul, "to such a declaration I submit. You certainly ought to be perfectly well informed, I acknowledge; and as a man of honor is incapable of saying anything but what he knows to be true, or of speaking otherwise than what he thinks, I shall say no more, but confess myself defeated, and leave you in possession of the field of battle." Whereupon Raoul, who now seemed only to care to be left quiet, threw himself upon a large couch, while the count summoned his servants to aid him in dressing.

The chevalier, finding that time was passing away, wished to leave; but he feared, too, that Raoul, left alone with De Guiche, might yet influence him to change his resolution. He therefore made use of his last resource. "Madame," he said, "will be brilliant; she appears to-night in her costume of Pomona."

"Ah, that is true!" exclaimed the count.

"And she has just given directions accordingly," continued the chevalier. "You know, M. de Bragelonne that the king is to appear as Spring."

"It will be admirable," said De Guiche; "and that is a better reason for me to remain than any you have yet given, because I am to appear as Autumn, and shall have to dance with Madame. I cannot absent myself without

the king's orders, since my departure would interrupt the ballet."

"I," said the chevalier, "am to be only a simple *égypan;* it is true that I am a bad dancer and my legs are not well made. Monsieur, *au revoir!* Do not forget the basket of fruit which you are to offer to Pomona, Count!"

"Oh, be assured," said De Guiche, enraptured, "I shall forget nothing."

"I am now quite certain that he will not go away," murmured the Chevalier de Lorraine to himself as he went out.

Raoul, when the chevalier had left, did not even attempt to dissuade his friend, for he felt that it would be trouble thrown away; he merely observed to the count, in his melancholy and melodious voice: "You are entering upon a most dangerous passion, Count. I know you well; you go to extremes in everything, and she whom you love does so too. Admitting for an instant that she should come to love you —"

"Oh, never!" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Why do you say never?"

"Because it would be a great misfortune for both of us."

"In that case, my dear friend, instead of regarding you as simply imprudent, I cannot but consider you as absolutely mad."

"Why?"

"Are you perfectly sure — mind, answer me frankly — that you desire nothing of her whom you love?"

"Oh, yes; quite sure!"

"Love her then at a distance."

"What! at a distance?"

"Certainly; what matters being present or absent,

since you expect nothing from her? Love a portrait, a remembrance!"

"Raoul!"

"Love a shadow, an illusion, a chimera; love love itself, by giving a name to your ideal. Ah! you turn away; your servants approach; I shall say no more. In good or bad fortune, De Guiche, depend upon me."

"Indeed I shall do so."

"Very well; that is all I had to say to you. Spare no pains in your person, De Guiche, and look your very best. Adieu!"

"You will not be present, then, at the repetition of the ballet, Viscount?"

"No; I have a visit to pay in town. Farewell, De Guiche!"

The reception was to take place in the king's apartments. In the first place, there were the queens, then Madame, and a few ladies of honor who had been selected. A great number of courtiers, also carefully selected, occupied the time before the dancing began in conversing, as people knew how to converse in those times. None of the ladies who had received invitations appeared in the costumes of the *fête*, as the Chevalier de Lorraine had predicted; but many conversations took place about the rich and ingenious toilets designed by different painters for the ballet of "The Demigods,"—for thus were termed the kings and queens of whom Fontainebleau was about to become the Pantheon. Monsieur arrived, holding in his hand a drawing representing his character; he still looked somewhat uneasy. He bowed most courteously and affectionately to the young queen and to his mother, but saluted Madame almost cavalierly, and then turned upon his heel. This movement and his coldness of manner were observed by all. M. de

Guiche indemnified the princess by a look of passionate devotion; and it must be admitted that Madame, as she raised her eyes, returned it to him with usury. It is unquestionable that De Guiche had never looked so handsome, for Madame's glance had in some way lighted up the features of the son of the Maréchal de Grammont.

The king's sister-in-law felt a storm mustering above her head; she felt, too, that during the whole of the day, so pregnant with future events, she had acted unjustly, if not very treasonably, towards one who loved her with such a depth of devotion. The moment seemed to her to have arrived for an acknowledgment to the poor victim of the injustice of the morning. Her heart spoke, and murmured the name of De Guiche; the count was sincerely pitied, and accordingly gained the victory over all others. Neither Monsieur nor the king nor the Duke of Buckingham was any longer thought of; and De Guiche at that moment reigned without a rival. Monsieur also looked very handsome; still he could not be compared to the count. It is well known — indeed, all women say so — that a very wide difference invariably exists between the good looks of a lover and those of a husband. Besides, in the present case, after Monsieur had left, and after the courteous and affectionate recognition of the young queen and of the queen-mother and the careless and indifferent notice of Madame, which all the courtiers had remarked, — all these incidents, we say, in that combination gave the lover the advantage over the husband. Monsieur was too great a personage to notice these details. Nothing is so certain as a well-settled idea of superiority to prove the inferiority of the man who has that opinion of himself.

The king arrived. Every one looked for what might possibly happen, in the glance which began to bestir the

world, like the brow of Jupiter Tonans. Louis had none of his brother's gloominess, but was perfectly radiant. Having examined a greater part of the drawings which were displayed for his inspection on every side, he gave his opinion or his criticism upon them, and in this manner rendered some happy and others unhappy by a single word. Suddenly his glance, which was smilingly directed towards Madame, detected the silent correspondence which was established between the princess and the count. He bit his royal lips, but when he opened them again to utter a few commonplace remarks, he said, advancing towards the queens: "Mesdames, I have just been informed that everything is now prepared at Fontainebleau, in accordance with my directions." A murmur of satisfaction arose from the different groups, and the king perceived on every face the greatest anxiety to receive an invitation for the festivities. "I shall leave to-morrow," he added. Whereupon there was the profoundest silence in the assemblage. "And I invite," said the king, finishing, "all those who are now present to get ready to accompany me."

Smiling faces were now everywhere visible, with the exception of Monsieur, who seemed to retain his ill-humor. The different noblemen and ladies of the court thereupon defiled before the king, one after the other, in order to thank his Majesty for the great honor of the invitation. When it came to De Guiche's turn, the king said, "Ah, Monsieur, I did not see you."

The count bowed, and Madame turned pale. De Guiche was about to open his lips to express his thanks, when the king said, "Count, this is the season for the second sowing of crops; I am sure that your tenants in Normandy will be glad to see you upon your estate."

The king, after this cruel blow, turned his back to the

unhappy man, whose turn it was now to become pale; he advanced a few steps towards the king, forgetting that his Majesty is never spoken to except in reply to questions addressed. "I have perhaps misunderstood your Majesty," he stammered out.

The king turned his head slightly, and with a cold and stern glance, which plunged like a sword relentlessly into the hearts of those under disgrace, repeated, "I said, Retire to your estates," allowing every syllable to fall slowly one by one.

A cold perspiration bedewed the count's face; his hands convulsively opened; and his hat, which he held between his trembling fingers, fell to the ground. Louis sought his mother's glance, as though to show her that he was master; he sought his brother's triumphant look, as if to ask him if he were satisfied with the vengeance taken; and lastly, his eyes fell upon Madame. But the princess was talking and smiling with Madame de Noailles. She had heard nothing, or rather pretended to have heard nothing. The Chevalier de Lorraine looked on, also, with one of those looks of settled hostility which seem to give to a man's glance the power of a lever when it raises an obstacle, wrests it away, and casts it to a distance.

M. de Guiche was left alone in the king's cabinet, the whole of the company having departed. Shadows danced before his eyes. He suddenly broke through the fixed despair which overwhelmed him, and flew to hide himself in his own rooms, where Raoul still awaited him, confident in his own sad presentiments.

"Well," murmured the latter, seeing his friend enter, bareheaded, with a wild gaze and tottering steps.

"Yes, yes, it is true," said De Guiche, unable to utter more, and falling exhausted upon the couch.

"And she?" inquired Raoul.

"She!" exclaimed his unhappy friend, as he raised his hand, clinched in anger towards heaven. "She!—"

"What did she say and do?"

"She said that her dress suited her admirably, and then she laughed." A fit of hysteric laughter seemed to shatter the nerves of the poor exile; for he fell backwards, completely overcome.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FONTAINEBLEAU.

For four days every kind of enchantment brought together in the magnificent gardens of Fontainebleau had converted this spot into a place of delight. M. Colbert seemed gifted with ubiquity. In the morning there were the accounts of the previous night's expenses to settle; during the day, programmes, essays, enlistments, payments. M. Colbert had secured four million livres, and disposed of them with wise economy. He was dismayed at the expenses which mythology involved; every wood-nymph, every dryad, did not cost less than a hundred livres a day. The dress alone amounted to three hundred livres. The expense for powder and sulphur for fireworks amounted, every night, to a hundred thousand livres. In addition to these, the illuminations on the borders of the sheet of water cost thirty thousand livres every evening. The *fêtes* had been magnificent; and Colbert could not restrain his delight. From time to time he noticed Madame and the king setting forth on hunting expeditions, or preparing for the reception of different fantastic personages, — solemn ceremonials, which had been extemporized a fortnight before, and in which Madame's sparkling wit and the king's magnificence were equally displayed.

For Madame, the heroine of the *fête*, replied to the addresses of the deputations from unknown races, — Garamanthians, Scythians, Hyperboreans, Caucasians, and

Patagonians, — who seemed to issue from the ground for the purpose of approaching her with their congratulations; and upon every representative of these races the king bestowed a diamond, or some other article of value. Then the deputies, in verses more or less amusing, compared the king to the sun, and Madame to Phœbe, the sun's sister; and the queen and Monsieur were no more spoken of than if the king had married Madame Henrietta of England, and not Maria Theresa of Austria. The happy pair, hand in hand, imperceptibly pressing each other's fingers, drank in deep draughts the sweet beverage of adulation, by which the attractions of youth, beauty, power, and love are enhanced.

Every one at Fontainebleau was amazed at the extent of the influence which Madame had so rapidly acquired over the king, and whispered among themselves that Madame was, in point of fact, the true queen; and certainly the king himself proclaimed it by his every thought, word, and look. He formed his wishes, he drew his inspirations from Madame's eyes, and his delight was unbounded when Madame deigned to smile upon him. And was Madame, on her side, intoxicated with the power she wielded, as she beheld every one at her feet? She herself could not tell; but what she did know was that she could frame no wish, and that she felt herself to be perfectly happy.

The result of all these changes which emanated from the royal will was that Monsieur, instead of being the second person in the kingdom, had in reality become the third. And it was now far worse than in the time when De Guiche's guitars were heard in Madame's apartments; for then, at least, Monsieur had the satisfaction of frightening away those who annoyed him. But since the departure of the enemy, who had been driven away through

his alliance with the king, Monsieur had to submit to a burden heavier than his former one, but still very different. Every evening Madame returned home quite exhausted. Horse-riding, bathing in the Seine, spectacles, dinners under the leafy covert of the trees, balls on the banks of the grand canal, concerts, — all this would have been sufficient to kill, not a slight and delicate woman, but the strongest Swiss porter in the *château*. It is true that with regard to dancing, concerts, and promenades a woman is far stronger than the most robust son of the thirty cantons. But however great a woman's strength may be, there is a limit to it, and she cannot hold out long under such a system. As for Monsieur, he had not even the satisfaction of witnessing Madame's abdication of her royalty in the evening, for she lived in the royal pavilion with the young queen and the queen-mother. As a matter of course, M. le Chevalier de Lorraine did not quit Monsieur, and did not fail to distil his drops of gall into every wound the latter received.

The result was that Monsieur — who had at first been in the highest spirits, completely restored since Guiche's departure — subsided into his melancholy state three days after the court was installed at Fontainebleau. Now it happened that one day about two o'clock in the afternoon Monsieur, who had risen late and had bestowed upon his toilet more than his usual attention, — it happened, we repeat, that Monsieur, who had not heard of any plans having been arranged for the day, formed the project of collecting his own court, and of carrying Madame off with him to take supper at Moret, where he possessed a charming country-house. He accordingly went to the queens' pavilion, and was astonished on entering to find none of the royal servants in attendance. Quite alone, therefore, he entered the rooms, — a door on

the left opening to Madame's apartment, the one on the right to the young queen's. In his wife's apartment Monsieur was informed by a sempstress who was working there, that every one had left at eleven o'clock to go and bathe in the Seine, that a grand *fête* was to be made of the expedition, that all the carriages had been brought to the park gates, and that they had all set out more than an hour before.

"Very good," said Monsieur; "the idea is a good one. The heat is very oppressive, and I have no objection to bathe too."

He summoned his servants, but no one came. He summoned those in attendance on Madame, but everybody had gone out. He then went to the stables, where he was informed by a groom that there were no carriages of any description. He then desired that a couple of horses should be saddled, — one for himself, and the other for his valet. The groom told him politely that there were no more horses. Monsieur, pale with anger, again went up to the queens' apartments, and penetrated as far as Anne of Austria's oratory, where he perceived, through the half-opened tapestry-hangings, his young sister-in-law on her knees before the queen-mother and apparently weeping. He had not been either seen or heard. He cautiously approached the opening and listened, the sight of so much grief having aroused his curiosity. Not only was the young queen weeping, but she was complaining also. "Yes," she said, "the king neglects me; the king devotes himself to pleasures and amusements only, in which I have no share."

"Patience, patience, my daughter!" said Anne of Austria, in Spanish; and then, also in Spanish, added some words of advice which Monsieur did not understand. The queen replied by accusations, mingled with sobs and

tears, among which Monsieur often distinguished the word *banos*, which Maria Theresa emphasized with spiteful anger.

"The baths," said Monsieur to himself, — "it seems it is the baths that have put her out;" and he endeavored to put together the disconnected phrases which he had been able to understand from time to time. It was easy to see that the queen was complaining bitterly, and that, if Anne of Austria did not console her, she at least endeavored to do so. Monsieur was afraid to be detected listening at the door, and he therefore adopted the expedient of coughing. The two queens turned round at the sound, and Monsieur entered.

At the sight of the prince the young queen rose precipitately and dried her tears. Monsieur knew the people he had to deal with too well to ask questions, and was naturally too polite to remain silent; and he accordingly saluted them. The queen-mother smiled pleasantly at him, saying, "What do you want, my son?"

"I? — nothing," stammered Monsieur; "I was looking for — "

"Whom?"

"I was looking for Madame."

"Madame is at the baths."

"And the king?" said Monsieur, in a tone which made the queen tremble.

"The king also, and the whole court as well," replied Anne of Austria.

"Without you, Madame?" said Monsieur.

"Oh! I," said the young queen, — "I frighten all those who amuse themselves."

"And I, too, it seems," said Monsieur.

Anne of Austria silently made a sign to her daughter-in-law, who withdrew weeping.

Monsieur's brows contracted as he remarked, "What a cheerless house! What do you think of it, mother?"

"Why, no; everybody here is pleasure-hunting."

"Yes, indeed; that is the very thing which makes those dull who do not care for pleasure."

"In what a tone you say that, my dear Philip!"

"Upon my word, Madame, I speak as I think."

"Explain yourself. What is the matter?"

"Ask my sister-in-law, rather, who just now was relating all her grievances to you."

"Her grievances! What — "

"Yes, I was listening, — accidentally, I confess, but still I listened, — so that I heard only too well my sister complain of those famous baths of Madame — "

"What folly!"

"No, no, no; people are not always foolish when they weep. The queen said *banos;* does not that mean baths?"

"I repeat, my son," said Anne of Austria, "that your sister-in-law is most childishly jealous."

"In that case, Madame," replied the prince, "I too must with great humility accuse myself of possessing the same defect which she has."

"You also, my son?"

"Certainly."

"Are you too really jealous of these baths?"

"And why not, Madame, when the king goes to the baths with my wife, and does not take the queen? Why not, when Madame goes to the baths with the king, and does not do me the honor to tell me of it? And you require my sister-in-law to be satisfied, and require me to be satisfied too."

"But, my dear Philip," said Anne of Austria, "you are raving. You have driven the Duke of Buckingham

away; you have had M. de Guiche exiled; do you now wish to send the king away from Fontainebleau?"

"I do not pretend to anything of the kind, Madame," said Monsieur, bitterly; "but at least I can withdraw, and I shall do so."

"Jealous of the king, — jealous of your brother?"

"Yes, Madame, I am jealous of the king, — of my own brother; and very jealous too."

"Really, Monsieur," exclaimed Anne of Austria, affecting to be indignant and angry, "I begin to believe that you are mad, and a sworn enemy to my repose! I therefore abandon the place to you, for I have no means of defending myself against such wild conceptions."

She arose and left Monsieur a prey to a furious fit of passion. He remained for a moment completely bewildered; then, recovering himself in order completely to regain his strength, he again went to the stables, found the groom, once more asked him for a carriage or a horse, and upon his replying that there was neither the one nor the other, snatched a long whip from the hand of a stable-boy and began to pursue the poor devil of a groom all round the servants' courtyard, whipping him all the while in spite of his cries and his excuses; then, quite out of breath, covered with perspiration, and trembling in every limb, he returned to his own apartments, broke in pieces his most beautiful specimens of porcelain, and then got into bed, booted and spurred as he was, crying out for help.

CHAPTER XL.

THE BATH.

At Valvins, beneath the impenetrable shade of flowering osiers and willows, which, as they bent down their green heads, dipped the extremities of their branches in the blue waters, a long and flat-bottomed boat with ladders covered with long blue curtains served as a refuge for the bathing Dianas, who, as they left the water, were watched by twenty plumed Actæons, who eagerly and full of desire galloped up and down the moss-grown and sweet-smelling banks of the river. But Diana herself — even the modest Diana, clothed in her long chlamys — was less chaste, less impenetrable, than Madame, young and beautiful as the goddess herself. For, notwithstanding the fine tunic of the huntress, her round and white knee could be seen, and notwithstanding the sonorous quiver, her brown shoulders could be detected; whereas in Madame's case a long white veil enveloped her, wrapping her round and round a hundred times as she resigned herself into the hands of her female attendants, and thus was rendered inaccessible to the most indiscreet as well as to the most penetrating gaze. When she ascended the ladder, the poets who were present, — and all were poets when Madame was the subject of discussion, — the twenty poets who were galloping about stopped and with one voice exclaimed that pearls, and not drops of water, were falling from her person, to be lost again in the happy river. The king, the centre of

these effusions and of this homage, imposed silence upon those expatiators, whose raptures were inexhaustible, and rode away for fear of offending even under the silken curtains the modesty of the woman and the dignity of the princess. A great blank thereupon ensued in the scene, and a perfect silence in the boat. From the movements on board — from the flutterings and agitations of the curtains — the goings to and fro of the female attendants engaged in their duties could be guessed.

The king smilingly listened to the conversation of the gentlemen around him, but it could easily be perceived that he gave but little if any attention to their remarks. In fact, hardly had the sound of the rings sliding along the curtain-rods announced that Madame was dressed and that the goddess was about to make her appearance, than the king, returning to his former post immediately, and running quite close to the river-bank, gave the signal for all those to approach whose attendance or pleasure summoned them to Madame's side. The pages hurried forward, conducting the led horses ; the carriages, which had remained sheltered under the trees, advanced towards the tent, followed by a crowd of servants, bearers, and female attendants, who while their masters had been bathing had mutually exchanged their own observations, their critical remarks, and the discussion of matters of interest, — the fugitive journal of that period, of which no record is preserved, not even by the waters, the mirror of individuals, echo of conversations, — witnesses whom Heaven has hurried into immensity as he has hurried the actors themselves into eternity.

All this crowd of people swarming upon the banks of the river, without reckoning the groups of peasants attracted by their anxiety to see the king and the princess, occasioned for many minutes the most disorderly but the

most agreeable confusion imaginable. The king dismounted from his horse, — a movement which was imitated by all the courtiers, — and offered his hand to Madame, whose rich riding-habit displayed her elegant figure, which was set off to great advantage by that garment, made of fine woollen cloth embroidered with silver. Her hair, still damp, and blacker than jet, hung in heavy masses upon her white and delicate neck. Joy and health sparkled in her beautiful eyes; composed, and yet full of energy, she inhaled the air in deep draughts under the embroidered parasol which was borne by one of her pages. Nothing could be more charming, more graceful, more poetical, than these two figures buried under the rose-colored shade of the parasol, — the king, whose white teeth were displayed in continual smiles; and Madame, whose black eyes sparkled like two carbuncles in the glittering reflection of the changing hues of the silk.

When Madame approached her horse, — a magnificent Andalusian pacer of spotless white, somewhat heavy, perhaps, but with a spirited and slender head, in which the mixture so happily combined of Arabian and Spanish blood could be readily traced, and whose long tail swept the ground, — and affected difficulty in mounting, the king took her in his arms in such a manner that Madame's arm was clasped like a circlet of fire around the king's neck. Louis, as he withdrew, involuntarily touched with his lips the arm, which was not withheld, and the princess having thanked her royal equerry, every one sprang to his saddle at once. The king and Madame drew aside to allow the carriages, the outriders, and runners to pass by. A fair proportion of the cavaliers, released from the restraint which etiquette had imposed on them, gave the rein to their horses, and darted after

the carriages which bore the maids of honor, as blooming as so many Oreades around Diana; and the whirlwind, laughing, chattering, and noisy, passed onward.

The king and Madame kept their horses in hand at a foot-pace. Behind his Majesty and the princess his sister-in-law, certain of the courtiers — either seriously disposed, or anxious to be within reach or under the eyes of the king — followed at a respectful distance, restraining their impatient horses, regulating their pace by the steeds of the king and Madame, and abandoned themselves to all the delight and gratification which is to be found in the conversation of clever people, who can with perfect courtesy utter a thousand of the most atrocious aspersions on their neighbors. In their stifled laughter and in the little reticences of their sardonic humor, Monsieur, the poor absentee, was not spared. But they pitied and bewailed greatly the fate of De Guiche; and it must be confessed that their compassion, so far as he was concerned, was not misplaced.

Meanwhile the king and Madame, having breathed their horses, and repeated a hundred times over such remarks as the courtiers, who made them talk, had suggested to them, set off at a hand-gallop, and the shady avenues of the forest resounded to the heavy footfall of the mounted party. To the murmured conversations — to the remarks made in the character of confidential communications, and to the observations exchanged as it were mysteriously — succeeded the loudest bursts of laughter; from the very outriders to royalty itself merriment seemed to spread. Every one began to laugh and to cry out. The magpies and the jays flew away, uttering their guttural cries, beneath the waving arches of the oaks; the cuckoo stayed his monotonous cry in the recesses of the forest; the chaffinches and tomtits flew

away in clouds; while the roebucks and the fallow-deer bounded away, terrified, into the midst of the thickets. This crowd, spreading widely joy, confusion, and light wherever it passed, was preceded, it may be said, to the château by its own clamor.

As the king and Madame entered the village, they were both received by the general acclamations of the crowd. Madame hastened to look for Monsieur, for she instinctively understood that he had been far too long kept from sharing in this enjoyment. The king went to rejoin the queens; he knew he owed them — one especially — a compensation for his long absence. But Madame was not admitted to Monsieur's apartments, and she was informed that Monsieur was asleep. The king, instead of being met by Maria Theresa smiling, as was usual with her, found Anne of Austria in the gallery, watching for his return, who advanced to meet him, and taking him by the hand led him to her own apartment. No one ever knew what they said to each other, or rather what the queen-mother said to Louis XIV.; but it certainly might easily be guessed from the annoyed expression of the king's face as he came away from that interview.

But we, whose mission it is to interpret all things, as it is also to communicate our interpretations to our readers, — we should fail in our duty, if we were to leave them in ignorance of the result of this interview. It will be found sufficiently detailed — at least we hope so — in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE BUTTERFLY-CHASE.

The king, on retiring to his apartments to give some directions and to arrange his ideas, found on his toilet-glass a small note, the handwriting of which seemed disguised. He opened it and read: "Come quickly! I have a thousand things to say to you." The king and Madame had not been separated a sufficiently long time for these thousand things to be the result of the three thousand which they had been saying to each other during the journey which separated Valvins from Fontainebleau. The confused and hurried character of the note, too, gave the king a great deal to reflect upon. He occupied himself but slightly with his toilet, and set off to pay his visit to Madame. The princess, who did not wish to have the appearance of expecting him, had gone into the gardens with all her ladies. When the king was informed that Madame had left her apartments to go out for a walk, he collected all the gentlemen he could find at hand, and invited them to follow him to the gardens. Madame was engaged in chasing butterflies on a large lawn bordered with heliotrope and flowering broom. She was looking on, as the most adventurous and youngest of her ladies ran to and fro, and with her back turned to the hedge very impatiently awaited the arrival of the king, to whom she had given the rendezvous. The sound of many feet upon the gravel-walk made her turn round. Louis XIV. was bareheaded; he had struck down with his cane a peacock-

butterfly, which M. de Saint-Aignan had picked up from the grass quite stunned.

"You see, Madame," said the king, as he approached her, "that I too am hunting for you;" and then, turning to the gentlemen who formed his retinue, said, "Messieurs, see if each of you cannot obtain as much for these ladies," — a remark which was a signal for all to retire. And thereupon a curious spectacle might be observed: old and corpulent courtiers ran after butterflies, losing their hats as they ran, and with their raised canes cutting down the myrtles and the furze, as they would have cut down the Spaniards.

The king offered Madame his arm, and they both selected, as a centre of observation, a bench with a roofing of moss, — a kind of hut roughly designed by the modest genius of some gardener who had introduced the picturesque and the fanciful amid the formal style of gardening of that period. This sheltered retreat, covered with nasturtiums and climbing roses, screened a bench without a back; so that the spectators within, insulated in the middle of the lawn, saw and were seen on every side, but could not be heard, without perceiving those who might approach for the purpose of listening. Seated thus, the king made a sign of encouragement to the hunters; and then, as if he were engaged with Madame in a dissertation upon the butterfly, which he had thrust through with a gold pin and fastened on his hat, said to her, "How admirably we are placed here for conversation!"

"Yes, Sire, for I wished to be heard by you alone, and yet to be seen by every one."

"And I also," said Louis.

"My note surprised you?"

"Terrified me, rather. But what I have to tell you is more important."

"Oh, no, indeed! Do you know that Monsieur has closed his door against me?"

"Why so?"

"Can you not guess why?"

"Ah, Madame! in that case we have both the same thing to say to each other."

"What has happened to you, then?"

"You wish me to begin?"

"Yes, for I have told you all."

"Well, then, as soon as I returned, I found my mother waiting for me, and she led me away to her own apartments."

"Oh! the queen-mother?" said Madame, with some anxiety; "that is serious."

"Indeed it is, for this is what she told me — But in the first place allow me to preface what I have to say with one remark. Has Monsieur ever spoken to you about me?"

"Often."

"Has he ever spoken to you about his jealousy?"

"Oh, more frequently still!"

"Of his jealousy of me?"

"No, but of Buckingham and De Guiche."

"Well, Madame, Monsieur's present idea is to be jealous of myself."

"Really," replied the princess, smiling archly.

"And it really seems to me," continued the king, "that we have never given any ground —"

"Never! at least I have not. But how did you learn about Monsieur's jealousy?"

"My mother represented to me that Monsieur entered her apartments like a madman; that he uttered a thousand complaints against you, and — forgive me for saying it — against your coquetry. It appears that Monsieur indulges in injustice too."

"You are very kind, Sire."

"My mother reassured him; but he pretended that people reassure him too often, and that he had had quite enough of it."

"Would it not be better for him not to make himself uneasy in any way?"

"The very thing I said."

"Confess, Sire, that the world is very wicked. Is it possible that a brother and sister cannot converse together, or take pleasure in each other's society, without giving rise to remarks and suspicions? For indeed, Sire, we are doing no harm, and have no intention of doing any;" and she looked at the king with that proud and provoking glance which kindles desire in the coldest and wisest of men.

"No," sighed Louis; "that is true."

"Know well, Sire, that if this were to continue, I should be obliged to make a disturbance. Do you decide upon our conduct, and say whether it has, or has not, been perfectly correct."

"Oh! certainly, — perfectly correct."

"Often alone together, — for we delight in the same things, — we might possibly be led away into error, but have we done so? I regard you as a brother, and nothing more." The king frowned. She continued: "Your hand, which often meets my own, does not excite in me that agitation and emotion which lovers, for instance —"

"Enough," said the king, in torture, — "enough, I entreat you! You have no pity, — you are killing me."

"What is the matter?"

"In fact, then, you distinctly say that you experience nothing when near me."

"Oh, Sire! I do not say that, — my affection —"

"Enough, Henrietta, I again entreat you! If you believe me to be marble, as you are, undeceive yourself."

"I do not understand you."

"Very well," sighed the king, casting down his eyes. "And so our meetings, the pressure of each other's hands, the looks we have exchanged — Yes, yes; you are right, and I understand your meaning;" and he buried his face in his hands.

"Take care, Sire!" said Madame, hurriedly; "here is M. de Saint-Aignan looking at you."

"Of course," said Louis, angrily; "never even the shadow of liberty, never any sincerity in my intercourse with any one! I imagine I have found a friend, and he is nothing but a spy; a dearer friend, and she is only a — sister!"

Madame was silent, and cast down her eyes. "My husband is jealous," she murmured, in a tone whose charm and sweetness could not be equalled.

"Oh!" exclaimed the king, suddenly, "you are right."

"You see," she said, looking at him in a manner that set his heart on fire, "you are free, you are not suspected; the peace of your house is not disturbed."

"Alas! as yet you know nothing, for the queen is jealous."

"Maria Theresa!"

"Perfectly mad with jealousy! Monsieur's jealousy arises from hers. She was weeping and complaining to my mother, and was reproaching us for those bathing-parties, so pleasant to me."

"And me too," answered Madame by a look.

"When suddenly," continued the king, "Monsieur, who was listening, heard the word *banos*, which the queen pronounced with some degree of bitterness; that awakened his attention. He entered the room, looking

quite wild, broke into the conversation, and began to quarrel with my mother so bitterly that she was obliged to escape from his presence; so that while you have a jealous husband to deal with, I shall have perpetually present before me an inexorable spectre of jealousy, with swollen eyes, a cadaverous face, and sinister looks."

"Poor king!" murmured Madame, letting her hand lightly brush against that of Louis.

Louis retained her hand in his; and in order to press it without exciting suspicion in the spectators, who were not so much taken up with hunting the butterflies that they could not hunt for news and seek to learn some secret from the interview of the king and Madame, he placed the dying butterfly before his sister-in-law, and both bent over it as if to count the thousand eyes on its wings or the particles of golden dust which covered it. But neither of them spoke; however, their hair mingled, their breath united, and their hands feverishly throbbed in each other's grasp. Five minutes passed by in this manner.

CHAPTER XLII.

WHAT WAS CAUGHT IN CHASING BUTTERFLIES.

THE two young people remained for a moment with their heads bent down, bowed as it were beneath the mutual consciousness of nascent love which at twenty years of age gives birth to so many happy fancies. Madame Henrietta gave a side glance from time to time at Louis. Hers was one of those finely organized natures capable of looking inwardly at itself as well as at others at the same moment. She perceived love lying at the bottom of Louis's heart, as a skilful diver sees a pearl at the bottom of the sea. She knew that the king was hesitating, if not in doubt, and that his indolent or timid heart required aid and encouragement. "Consequently?" she said interrogatively, breaking the silence.

"What do you mean?" inquired Louis, after a moment's pause.

"I mean that I shall be obliged to return to the resolution I had formed."

"To what resolution?"

"To that which I have already submitted to your Majesty."

"When?"

"On the very day when we had a certain explanation about Monsieur's jealousies."

"What did you say to me then?" inquired Louis, with some anxiety.

"Do you not remember, Sire?"

"Alas! if it be another cause of unhappiness, I shall recollect it soon enough."

"A cause of unhappiness for myself alone, Sire," replied Madame Henrietta; "but it is a necessary misfortune, and I must submit to it."

"At least, tell me what it is," said the king.

"Absence."

"Still that unkind resolve?"

"Believe me, Sire, I have not formed it without a violent struggle with myself; it is absolutely necessary that I should return to England."

"Never, never will I permit you to leave France," exclaimed the king.

"And yet, Sire," said Madame, affecting a gentle yet sorrowful determination, "nothing is more urgently necessary; nay, more than that, I am persuaded that it is your mother's will that I should do so."

"Will!" exclaimed the king; "my dear sister, that is a very strange expression to use to me."

"Still," replied Madame Henrietta, smilingly, "are you not happy in submitting to the wishes of so good a mother?"

"Enough, I implore you; you rend my very soul!"

"I?"

"Yes; for you speak of your departure with real tranquillity."

"I was not born for happiness, Sire," replied the princess, in a melancholy tone; "and I acquired, in very early life, the habit of seeing my dearest hopes disappointed."

"Do you speak truly?" said the king. "Would your departure cross any one of your cherished thoughts?"

"If I were to say 'Yes,' is it not true, Sire, that you would begin to take your misfortune patiently?"

"How cruel you are!"

"Take care, Sire! some one is coming."

The king looked all round him, and said, "No, there is no one," and then continued: "Come, Henrietta, instead of trying to contend against Monsieur's jealousy by a departure which would kill me," — Henrietta slightly shrugged her shoulders, like a woman unconvinced, — "yes," repeated Louis, "which would kill me, I say, — instead of fixing your mind on this departure, does not your imagination, or rather does not your heart, suggest some expedient?"

"*Mon Dieu*, what is it you wish my heart to suggest?"

"Tell me, how can one prove to another that he is mistaken in his jealousy?"

"In the first place, Sire, by giving no motive for jealousy; in other words, by loving no one but the one in question."

"Oh! I expected better than that."

"What did you expect?"

"That you would simply answer that jealous people are pacified by concealing the affection which is entertained for the object of their jealousy."

"Dissimulation is difficult, Sire."

"Yet it is only by means of conquering difficulties that any happiness is attained. So far as I am concerned, I swear I will give the lie to those who are jealous of me, if it is necessary, by pretending to treat you like any other woman."

"A bad as well as an unsafe means," said the young woman, shaking her pretty head.

"You seem to think everything bad, dear Henrietta," said Louis, discontentedly. "You refute everything I propose. Suggest, at least, something else in its stead

Come, try to think. I trust implicitly to a woman's invention. Do you invent in your turn."

"Well, Sire, I have hit upon something. Will you listen to it?"

"Can you ask me? You speak of a matter of life or death to me, and then ask if I will listen?"

"Well, I judge of it by my own feelings. If my husband intended to put me on the wrong scent with regard to another woman, one thing would reassure me more than anything else."

"What would that be?"

"In the first place, to see that he never took any notice of the woman in question."

"Exactly. That is precisely what I said just now."

"Very well; but in order to be perfectly reassured, I should wish to see him occupy himself with some one else."

"Ah! I understand you," replied Louis, smiling. "But confess, dear Henrietta, if the means is ingenious, it is hardly charitable."

"Why so?"

"In curing the dread of a wound in a jealous person's mind, you inflict one upon his heart. His fear ceases, it is true; but the evil still exists, and that seems to me to be far worse."

"Agreed. But at least he does not detect, he does not suspect, the real enemy; he does no prejudice to love itself; he concentrates all his strength on the side where his strength will do no injury to anything or any one. In a word, Sire, my plan, which I confess I am surprised to find you dispute, is mischievous to jealous people, it is true; but to lovers it is full of advantage. Besides, let me ask, Sire, who — except yourself, perhaps — has ever thought of pitying jealous people? Are they not a

melancholy set of creatures, always equally unhappy, whether with or without a cause? You may remove that cause, but you do not put an end to their sufferings. It is a disease which lies in the imagination; and like all imaginary disorders, it is incurable. By the by, I remember an aphorism upon this subject of poor Dr. Dawley, — a learned and witty man, whom had it not been for my brother, who could not do without him, I should have with me now. He used to say to me: 'Whenever you suffer from two affections, choose that which will give you the least trouble. I will leave you that; for it is certain,' he said, 'that it will be of the greatest use to me in enabling me to get rid of the other.'"

"Well and judiciously remarked, dear Henrietta," replied the king, smiling.

"Oh! we have some clever people in London, Sire."

"And those clever people produce adorable pupils. I will grant this Daley, Darley, Dawley — or whatever you call him — a pension to-morrow for his aphorism; but I entreat you, Henrietta, to begin by choosing the least of your evils. You do not answer, — you smile. I guess that the least of your evils is your stay in France. I will allow you to retain this misfortune; and in order to begin with the cure of the other, I will this very day begin to look out for a subject which shall divert the attention of the jealous members of either sex who persecute us both."

"Hush! this time some one is really coming," said Madame; and she stooped down to gather a periwinkle from the thick grass at her feet. Some one, in fact, was approaching; for suddenly a bevy of young girls ran down from the top of the little hillock, following the cavaliers, — the cause of this irruption being a magnifi-

cent hawk-moth, with its upper wings like the plumage of the tawny owl, and the lower wings like rose-leaves. The prey in question had fallen into the net of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who displayed it with some pride to her less successful rivals. The queen of the chase had seated herself some twenty paces from the bench on which were Louis and Madame Henrietta, and leaned her back against a magnificent oak-tree entwined with ivy, and stuck the butterfly on the long cane she carried in her hand. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was very beautiful; and the gentlemen accordingly deserted her companions, and under the pretext of complimenting her upon her success pressed in a circle around her. The king and the princess looked at this scene as spectators of maturer age look on at the games of little children.

"They seem to be amusing themselves there," said the king.

"Greatly, Sire; I have always found that people are amused wherever youth and beauty are to be found."

"What do you think of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, Henrietta?" inquired the king.

"I think that she is rather fair in complexion," replied Madame, fixing in a moment upon the only fault it was possible to find in the almost perfect beauty of the future Madame de Montespan.

"Rather fair, yes; but beautiful, I think, in spite of that."

"Is that your opinion, Sire?"

"Yes, really."

"Well, then, it is mine too."

"And she seems to be much sought after too."

"Oh! that is a matter of course; lovers flutter from one to another. If we had hunted for lovers instead of

butterflies, you can see from those who surround her what successful sport we should have had."

"Tell me, Henrietta, what would be said if the king were to make himself one of those lovers and let his glance fall in that direction? Would some one else be jealous in such a case?"

"Oh, Sire, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is a very efficacious remedy," said Madame, with a sigh. "She would cure a jealous man, certainly; but she might possibly make a woman jealous too."

"Henrietta," exclaimed Louis, "you fill my heart with joy! Yes, yes, you are right, — Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is far too beautiful to serve as a cloak."

"A king's cloak," said Madame Henrietta, smiling, "ought to be beautiful."

"Do you advise me to do it, then?" inquired Louis.

"I! What should I say, Sire, except that to give such advice would be to supply arms against myself? It would be folly or pride to advise you to take for the heroine of an assumed affection a woman more beautiful than the one for whom you pretend to feel real regard."

The king tried to take Madame's hand in his own. His eyes sought hers; and then he murmured a few words full of tenderness, but pronounced in so low a tone that the historian, who ought to hear everything, could not hear them. Then, speaking aloud, he said: "Do you yourself choose for me the one who is to cure our victim of jealousy. To her, then, all my devotion, all my attention, all the time that I can spare from my occupations, shall be devoted. For her, Henrietta, shall be the flower that I may pluck for you, the fond thoughts with which you have inspired me; towards her the glance that I dare not bestow upon you, and which ought to arouse you from your indifference. But be careful in

your selection, lest in trying to think of her, in offering her the rose which I may have plucked, I should find myself conquered by yourself; and lest my looks, my hand, my lips, should not turn immediately towards you, even were the whole world to guess my secret!"

While these words escaped from the king's lips in a stream of wild affection, Madame blushed, breathless, happy, proud, almost intoxicated with delight. She could find nothing to say in reply; her pride and her thirst for homage were satisfied. "I shall fail," she said, raising her beautiful eyes, "but not as you beg me; for, ah, Sire, all this incense which you wish to burn on the altar of another divinity, — I too shall be jealous of it, and want it to be restored to me, and would not wish that a particle of it should be lost in the way. Therefore, Sire, with your royal permission, I will choose one who shall appear to me the least likely to distract your attention, and who will leave my image inviolate in your heart."

"Happily for me," said the king, "your circle of attendants is not badly made up; otherwise I should be alarmed at the threat you hold out. Our precautions have been taken on this point, and around you, as around myself, it would be difficult to meet with a disagreeable-looking face."

While the king was speaking, Madame had risen from her seat and looked around the greensward; and after a careful and silent examination she called the king to her side, and said, "See, Sire, upon the declivity of that little hill, near that clump of gelder-roses, that beautiful girl walking alone behind the others, her head down, her arms hanging by her side, with her eyes fixed upon the flowers which she crushes beneath her feet, like one who is lost in thought."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière, do you mean?" remarked the king.

"Yes."

"Oh!"

"Will she not suit you, Sire?"

"Why, look how thin the poor child is! she has hardly any flesh upon her bones."

"Nay; am I stout, then?"

"She is so melancholy."

"The greater contrast to myself, who am accused of being too lively."

"She is lame."

"Do you think so?"

"No doubt of it; look, she has allowed every one to pass by her lest her defect should be remarked."

"Well, she will not run so fast as Daphne, and will not be able to escape Apollo."

"Henrietta," said the king, out of temper, "of all your maids of honor, you have really selected for me the one most full of defects."

"Still, she is one of my maids of honor; take note of that!"

"Of course; but what do you mean?"

"I mean that in order to visit this new divinity you will not be able to do so without paying a visit to my apartments, and that as propriety will forbid your conversing with your goddess in private, you will be compelled to see her in my circle, to speak to me while speaking to her. I mean, in fact, that those who may be jealous will be wrong if they suppose you come to my apartments for my sake, since you will come there for Mademoiselle de la Vallière's."

"Who happens to be lame."

"Hardly that."

"Who never opens her lips."

"But who, when she does open them, displays a beautiful set of teeth."

"Who may serve as a model for an osteologist."

"Your favor will ripen her charms."

"Henrietta!"

"At all events, you have allowed me to be the mistress."

"Alas! yes."

"Well, my choice is made; I impose her upon you, and you must submit."

"Oh! I would accept one of the furies, if you were to insist upon it."

"La Vallière is as gentle as a lamb; do not fear that she will ever contradict you when you tell her you love her," said Madame, laughing.

"You are not afraid, are you, that I shall say too much to her?"

"It would be for my sake."

"Very well."

"The treaty is agreed to, then?"

"And signed."

"You will continue to show me the friendship of a brother, the attention of a brother, the gallantry of a monarch, will you not?"

"I will preserve for you a heart which can no longer beat except at your command."

"Very well. Do you not see that we have secured the future by this means?"

"I hope so."

"Will your mother cease to regard me as an enemy?"

"Yes."

"Will Maria Theresa leave off speaking in Spanish before Monsieur, who has a horror of conversations held

in foreign languages, because he always thinks that he is being ill-spoken of?"

"Alas! is he wrong in that?" murmured the king, tenderly.

"And lastly," continued the princess, "will people persist in attributing a wrongful affection to the king, when the truth is, we can be nothing to each other, except in sympathy, free from all hidden designs?"

"Yes, yes," said the king, hesitatingly. "But yet other things may still be said."

"What can be said, Sire? Shall we never indeed be left in peace?"

"People will say," continued the king, "that I am wanting in taste; but what is my self-respect in comparison with your tranquillity?"

"In comparison with my honor, Sire, and that of our family, you mean. Besides, believe me, do not be so hastily prejudiced against La Vallière. She is lame, it is true, but she is not deficient in good sense. Moreover, all that the king touches is converted into gold."

"Well, Madame, be assured of one thing, — namely, that I am still grateful to you; you might make me pay dearer for your stay in France."

"Sire, some one approaches."

"Well!"

"One last word."

"Say it!"

"You are prudent and judicious, Sire; but in the present instance you will be obliged to summon to your aid all your prudence and all your judgment."

"Oh!" exclaimed Louis, laughing, "from this very evening I shall begin to act my part, and you shall see whether I am not quite fit to play the tender swain. After luncheon there will be a grand promenade in the

forest, and then there will be supper and the ballet at ten o'clock."

"I know it."

"The ardor of my passion shall blaze this evening more brilliantly than the fireworks, shall shine more steadily than the lamps of our friend Colbert; it shall shine so dazzlingly that the queens and Monsieur will be almost blinded by it."

"Take care, Sire, take care!"

"In Heaven's name, what have I done, then?"

"I shall begin to recall the compliments I paid you just now. You prudent, you wise, did I say? Why, you begin by the most reckless inconsistencies. Can a passion be kindled in this manner, like a torch, in a moment? Can a monarch like you, without any preliminaries, fall at the feet of a girl like La Vallière?"

"Ah! Henrietta, now I understand you. We have not yet begun the campaign, and you are plundering me already."

"No, I am only recalling you to sane ideas. Let your passion be kindled gradually, instead of allowing it to burst forth so suddenly. Jove's thunders and lightnings are heard and seen before the palace is set on fire. Everything has its beginning. If you are so easily excited, no one will believe that you are really captivated, and every one will think you out of your senses, — unless, indeed, the truth itself be not guessed. People are not always so foolish as they seem."

The king was obliged to admit that Madame was an angel for wisdom and a devil for cunning. He bowed, and said: "Agreed, Madame; I will think over my plan of attack. Great military men — my cousin De Condé, for instance — grow pale in meditation upon their strategical plans before they move one of the pawns which

people call armies. I therefore wish to draw up a complete plan of attack, for you know that the tender passion is subdivided in all sorts of ways. Well, then, I shall stop at the village of Little Attentions, at the hamlet of Love Letters, before I follow the road of Visible Affection; the way is clear enough, you know, and this poor Madame de Scudéry would never forgive me for passing through a halting-place without stopping."

"Oh! now that we have returned to our proper senses, shall we say adieu to each other, Sire?"

"Alas, it must be so; for, see! we are interrupted."

"Yes, indeed," said Madame Henrietta, "they are bringing us Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and her sphinx butterfly with the sound of the horn, after the manner of mighty huntsmen."

"It is perfectly well understood, then, that this evening, during the promenade, I am to make my escape into the forest, and finding La Vallière without you—"

"I will take care to send her away."

"Very well! I will speak to her when she is with her companions, and I will then discharge my first arrow at her."

"Be skilful," said Madame, laughing, "and do not miss the heart."

The princess took leave of the king, and went forward to meet the merry troop, which was advancing with much ceremony and a great many pretended flourishes of hunting-horns, which they imitated with their mouths.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE BALLET OF THE SEASONS.

At the conclusion of the banquet, which had been served at five o'clock, the king entered his cabinet, where his tailors were awaiting him, for the purpose of trying on the celebrated costume representing Spring, which had cost so many efforts of imagination and sober thought to the designers and ornament-workers of the court. As for the ballet itself, every person knew the part he had to take in it, and how to perform that part. The king had resolved to make it a matter of surprise. Hardly, therefore, had he finished his conference and entered his own apartment, when he desired his two masters of the ceremonies, De Villeroy and De Saint-Aignan, to be sent for. Both replied that they only awaited his orders, and that everything was ready to begin, but that it was necessary to make sure of fine weather and a favorable night before those orders could be carried out.

The king opened his window. The golden hues of evening could be seen in the horizon through the vistas of the wood; and the moon, white as snow, was already visible in the heavens. Not a ripple on the surface of the green waters; the swans themselves even, reposing with folded wings like ships at anchor, seemed impressed by the warmth of the air, the freshness of the water, and the silence of the beautiful evening. The king, having observed all these things and contemplated the magnificent picture before him, gave the order which Messieurs de Villeroy and de Saint-Aignan awaited; but with the view

of insuring the execution of this order in a royal manner, one last question was necessary, and Louis XIV. put it to the two gentlemen, in four words: "Have you any money?"

"Sire," replied De Saint-Aignan, "we have arranged everything with M. Colbert."

"Ah, very well!"

"Yes, Sire, and M. Colbert said that he would wait upon your Majesty as soon as your Majesty should manifest an intention of carrying out the festivities, of which he has furnished the programme."

"Let him come in, then," said the king; and as if Colbert had been listening at the door for the purpose of following the conversation, he entered as soon as the king had pronounced his name before the two courtiers.

"Ah, very good, M. Colbert!" said his Majesty. "Messieurs, to your posts!" whereupon De Saint-Aignan and De Villeroy took their leave. The king seated himself in an easy-chair near the window, saying, "The ballet will take place this evening, M. Colbert."

"In that case, Sire, I shall settle the accounts to-morrow."

"Why so?"

"I promised the tradespeople to pay their bills the day after that on which the ballet should take place."

"Very well, M. Colbert; pay them, since you have promised to do so."

"Certainly, Sire; but I must have money to do that."

"What! have not the four millions which M. Fouquet promised been sent? I had forgotten to ask you about that."

"Sire, they were sent to your Majesty at the hour promised."

"Well?"

"Well, Sire, the colored lamps, the fireworks, the musi-

cians, and the cooks have swallowed up four millions in a week."

"Entirely?"

"To the last sou. Every time that your Majesty directed the banks of the grand canal to be illuminated, as much oil was consumed as there was water in the basins."

"Well, well, M. Colbert; the fact is, then, you have no more money."

"I have no more, Sire; but M. Fouquet has," Colbert replied, his face darkening with a sinister expression of pleasure.

"What do you mean?" inquired Louis.

"Sire, we have already made M. Fouquet advance six millions. He has given them with too much readiness not to have others still to give, if they are required, which is the case at the present moment. It is necessary, therefore, that he should comply."

The king frowned. "M. Colbert," said he, accentuating the financier's name, "that is not the way I understood the matter. I do not wish against any one of my servants to make use of means which may oppress him and fetter his services. In a week M. Fouquet has furnished six millions; that is a good sum."

Colbert turned pale. "And yet," he said, "your Majesty did not use this language some time ago, — when the news about Belle-Isle arrived, for instance."

"That is true, M. Colbert."

"Nothing, however, has changed since then; quite the contrary, indeed."

"In my thoughts, Monsieur, everything has changed."

"Does your Majesty, then, no longer believe the attempts?"

"My own affairs concern me alone, Monsieur; and I have already told you that I transact them myself."

"Then I perceive," said Colbert, trembling with rage and fear, "that I have had the misfortune to fall into disgrace with your Majesty."

"Not at all; you are, on the contrary, most agreeable to me."

"Yet, Sire," said the minister, with a certain affected bluntness, so successful when it was a question of flattering Louis's self-esteem, "what use is there in being agreeable to your Majesty, if one can no longer be of any service to you?"

"I reserve your services for a better occasion; and, believe me, they will only be the better appreciated."

"Your Majesty's plan, then, in this affair is—"

"You want money, M. Colbert?"

"Seven hundred thousand livres, Sire."

"You will take them from my private treasure." Colbert bowed. "And," added Louis, "as it seems a difficult matter for you, notwithstanding your economy, to defray with so limited a sum the expenses which I intend to incur, I will sign you an order for three millions."

The king took a pen and signed an order immediately, then handed the paper to Colbert. "Be satisfied," said he; "M. Colbert, the plan I have adopted is one worthy of a king;" and with these words, pronounced with all the majesty which the young prince knew how to assume in such circumstances, he dismissed Colbert in order to give an audience to his tailors.

The order issued by the king was known throughout Fontainebleau; it was already known, too, that the king was trying on his costume, and that the ballet would be danced in the evening. The news circulated with the rapidity of lightning; during its progress it kindled every variety of coquetry, desire, and wild ambition. At the same moment, as if by enchantment, every one who knew

how to hold a needle — every one who could distinguish doublet from hose, as Molière says — was summoned to the assistance of the beaux and the ladies.

The king had completed his toilet at nine o'clock; he appeared in an open carriage decorated with branches of trees and flowers. The queens had taken their seats upon a magnificent daïs, or platform, erected upon the borders of the lake, in a theatre of wonderful elegance of construction. In the space of five hours the carpenters had put together all the different parts connected with the theatre; the upholsterers had laid down the carpets and erected the seats; and as if at the signal of an enchanter's wand, a thousand arms, aiding instead of interfering with one another, had constructed the building on this spot to the sound of music; while at the same time other workmen illuminated the theatre and the shores of the lake with an incalculable number of tapers.

As the heavens, set with stars, were perfectly unclouded, as not even a breath of air could be heard in the woods, — as if Nature herself had yielded complacently to the king's fancies, — the back of the theatre had been left open; so that, behind the foreground of the scenes, could be seen as a background the beautiful sky glittering with stars, the sheet of water on fire with the lights which were reflected in it, and the bluish outline of the grand masses of woods with their rounded tops. When the king made his appearance, the whole theatre was full, and presented to the view one vast group, dazzling with gold and precious stones, in which at the first glance no one single face could be distinguished. By degrees, as the eye became accustomed to so much splendor, the rarest beauties appeared to the view, as in the evening sky the stars appear one by one to him who closes his eyes and then opens them again.

The theatre represented a grove of trees: several fauns, lifting up their cloven feet, were leaping about here and there; a dryad appeared on the scene, and enticed them to pursuit of her; others gathered round her for her defence, and they quarrelled as they danced. Suddenly, to restore peace and order, Spring, accompanied by his whole court, made his appearance. The Elements, the subaltern powers of mythology, together with their attributes, crowded in the footsteps of their gracious sovereign. The Seasons, the allies of Spring, came to his side to form a quadrille, which after many words of more or less flattering import was the beginning of the dance. The music of hautboys, flutes, and viols was descriptive of rural delights.

The king had already entered upon the scene amid thunders of applause. He was dressed in a tunic of flowers, which set off his easy and well-formed figure to advantage. His legs, the best-shaped at the court, were also displayed to great advantage in flesh-colored silken hose, of silk so fine and so transparent that it seemed almost like flesh itself. The most beautiful pale-lilac satin shoes, with bows of flowers and leaves, confined his small feet. The bust of the figure was in harmonious keeping with the base. Beautiful waving hair; a fresh complexion, enhanced by the brilliancy of beautiful blue eyes, which softly kindled all hearts; a mouth with tempting lips, which deigned to open in smiles, — such was the prince of the period, who had that evening been justly named "The King of all the Loves." There was something in his carriage which resembled the buoyant majesty of an immortal; he did not dance, — he soared. His entrance had produced, therefore, the most brilliant effect. Suddenly the Comte de Saint-Aignan was observed endeavoring to approach either the king or Madame.

The princess — who was clothed in a long dress, diaphanous and light as the finest network tissue from the hands of the skilful Mechlin workers, her knee occasionally revealed beneath the folds of the tunic, and her dainty feet encased in silken shoes — advanced, radiant with beauty, accompanied by her *cortége* of Bacchantes, and had already reached the spot which had been assigned to her in the dance. The applause continued so long that the count had ample leisure to join the king, who was standing still.

"What is the matter, De Saint-Aignan?" said Spring.

"*Mon Dieu!* Sire," replied the courtier, as pale as death; "but your Majesty has not thought of the Fruits."

"Yes; it is suppressed."

"Far from it, Sire; your Majesty having given no directions about it, the musicians have retained it."

"How excessively annoying!" murmured the king. "This figure cannot be performed, since M. de Guiche is absent. It must be suppressed."

"Oh, Sire, a quarter of an hour's music without any dancing will produce an effect so chilling as to ruin the success of the ballet."

"But, Count, then —"

"Oh, Sire, that is not the greatest misfortune; for, after all, the orchestra could still just as well cut it out, if it were necessary; but —"

"But what?"

"Why, M. de Guiche is here."

"Here?" replied the king, frowning, — "here? Are you sure?"

"Yes, Sire; and ready-dressed for the ballet."

The king felt the color rise to his face, and said, "You are probably mistaken."

"So little is that the case, Sire, that if your Majesty

will look to the right, you will see that the count is waiting."

Louis turned hastily towards that side; and in fact, on the right, brilliant in his character of Autumn, De Guiche was waiting until the king should look at him, in order that he might address him. To describe the stupefaction of the king, and that of Monsieur, who was moving about restlessly in his box; to describe also the whisperings and the oscillation of the heads in the theatre, and the strange emotion of Madame at the sight of her partner, — is a task we must leave to abler hands.

The king stood almost gaping with astonishment as he looked at the count, who bowing lowly approached with the profoundest respect. "Sire," he said, "your Majesty's most humble servant comes to perform a service on this occasion, as he has done on the day of battle. Your Majesty, in omitting the dance of the Fruits, would be losing the most beautiful scene in the ballet. I did not wish to be the cause of so great a prejudice to your Majesty's elegance, skill, and graceful address; and I have left my tenants in order to offer my services to my prince."

Every word fell distinctly, in perfect harmony and eloquence, upon Louis XIV.'s ears. Their flattery pleased, as much as De Guiche's courage had astonished him, and he contented himself with replying, "I did not tell you to return, Count."

"Certainly not, Sire; but your Majesty did not tell me to remain."

The king perceived that time was passing away, that if the scene were prolonged it might complicate everything, and that a single cloud upon the picture would irredeemably spoil the whole. Besides, the king's heart suggested some bright ideas; he had just derived fresh

inspiration from the eloquent glances of Madame. Henrietta's look had said to him, "Since they are jealous of you, divide their suspicions, for the man who distrusts two rivals does not distrust either in particular;" so that Madame by this clever diversion decided him. The king smiled upon De Guiche, who did not comprehend a word of Madame's dumb language, but only remarked that she pretended not to look at him; and he attributed the pardon which had been conferred upon him to the princess's kindness of heart.

The king seemed pleased with every one present. Monsieur alone could not understand. The ballet began; it was magnificent. When the music by its bursts of melody carried away these illustrious dancers; when the simple, untutored pantomime of that period, far more naïve on account of the very indifferent acting of the august actors, had reached its culminating point of triumph, — the theatre almost fell, with the tumultuous applause.

De Guiche shone like a sun, but like a courtly sun which is contented to fill a subordinate part. Disdainful of a success of which Madame showed no acknowledgment, he thought of nothing but of boldly regaining the marked preference of the princess. She, however, did not bestow a single glance upon him. By degrees all his happiness, all his brilliancy, subsided into grief and anxiety; so that his limbs lost their power, his arms hung heavily by his side, and his head seemed stupefied. The king, who had from this moment become in reality the principal dancer in the quadrille, cast a side glance upon his vanquished rival. De Guiche ceased to sustain even the character of the courtier; without applause, he danced indifferently, and very soon could not dance at all. The triumph of the king and of Madame was assured.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE NYMPHS OF THE PARK OF FONTAINEBLEAU.

THE king remained for a moment to enjoy his triumph, which we have said was as complete as it could possibly be. He then turned towards Madame, for the purpose of admiring her also a little. Young persons love with more vivacity, perhaps with greater ardor and deeper passion, than others of a riper age, but all the other feelings are at the same time active in proportion to their youth and vigor; so that vanity being with them almost always the equivalent of love, the latter feeling, according to the laws of equipoise, never attains that degree of perfection which it acquires in men and women from thirty to five-and-thirty years of age. Louis thought of Madame, but only after he had carefully thought of himself; and Madame carefully thought of herself, without perhaps bestowing a single thought upon the king.

The victim, however, amid all this royal love and vanity was De Guiche. Every one could observe the agitation and the prostration of the poor gentleman, — a prostration which was, indeed, the more remarkable since people were not accustomed to see him with his arms hanging listlessly by his side, his head heavy, and his eyes with their bright intelligence gone. It rarely happened that any uneasiness was excited on his account, whenever a question of elegance or taste was under discussion, and De Guiche's defeat was accordingly attributed by the greater number present to his courtier-like

tact and ability. But there were others — keen-sighted observers are always to be met with at court — who remarked his paleness and his listlessness, which he could neither feign nor conceal; and they concluded, with reason, that De Guiche was not acting the part of a flatterer. All these sufferings, successes, and comments were blended, confounded, and lost in the uproar of applause.

When, however, the queens had expressed their satisfaction and the spectators their enthusiasm, when the king had retired to his dressing-room to change his costume, and while Monsieur — dressed as a woman, as he delighted to be — was, in his turn, dancing about, De Guiche, who had now recovered himself, approached Madame, who, seated at the back of the theatre, was waiting for the second part, and had created a solitude for herself in the midst of the crowd, to meditate as it were beforehand upon chorographic effects; and it will be perfectly understood that, absorbed in this deep meditation, she did not see, or rather she pretended not to see, anything that was going on around her. De Guiche, then, observing that she was alone, near a thicket constructed of painted cloth, approached her. Two of her maids of honor, dressed as hamadryads, seeing De Guiche advance, drew back out of respect, whereupon De Guiche proceeded towards the middle of the circle and saluted her royal Highness; but whether she did or did not observe his salutation, her royal Highness did not even turn her head. A cold shiver passed through the unhappy man; he was unprepared for so utter an indifference, for he had neither seen nor been told of anything that had taken place, and consequently could guess nothing. Remarking, therefore, that his obeisance obtained him no acknowledgment, he advanced one step farther, and in a voice which

he tried, though uselessly, to render calm, he said, "I have the honor to present my most humble respects to your royal Highness."

Upon this Madame deigned to turn her eyes languidly towards the count, observing, "Ah! M. de Guiche, is that you? Good-day!" and she turned away again.

The count's patience almost forsook him, as he continued, "Your royal Highness danced just now most enchantingly."

"Do you think so?" replied Madame, with indifference.

"Yes; the character which your royal Highness assumed is in perfect harmony with your own."

Madame again turned round, and looking De Guiche full in the face with a bright and steady gaze, said, "Why so?"

"Oh, there can be no doubt of it!"

"Explain yourself!"

"You represent a divinity, beautiful, disdainful, and inconstant," said he.

"You mean Pomona, Monsieur the Count?"

"I allude to the goddess your royal Highness represents."

Madame remained silent for a moment with her lips compressed, and then observed, "But, Monsieur, you, too, are an excellent dancer."

"Nay, Madame; I am only one of those who are never noticed, or who are soon forgotten if they ever happen to be noticed." And with this remark, accompanied by one of those deep sighs which affect the remotest fibres of one's being, his heart burdened with sorrow and throbbing fast, his head on fire, and his gaze wandering, he bowed breathlessly and withdrew behind the cloth thicket.

The only reply Madame condescended to make was

by slightly raising her shoulders; and since her ladies of honor had, as has been said, discreetly remained apart while the conversation lasted, she recalled them by a look. The ladies were Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente and Mademoiselle de Montalais. Both, at this signal from Madame, hastened to approach.

"Did you hear, Mesdemoiselles, what M. le Comte de Guiche said?" the princess inquired.

"No."

"It really is very singular," she continued in a compassionate tone, "how exile has affected poor M. de Guiche's wit;" and then in a louder voice, fearful lest her unhappy victim might lose a syllable, she said, "In the first place he danced badly, and then afterwards his remarks were very silly."

She then rose, humming the air to which she was presently going to dance. De Guiche had overheard everything. The arrow had pierced his heart and wounded him mortally. Then, at the risk of interrupting the progress of the *fête* by his ill-humor, he fled from the scene, tearing his beautiful costume of Autumn in pieces, and scattering, as he went along, the branches of vines, mulberry and almond trees, and all the other artificial attributes of his divinity. A quarter of an hour afterwards he had returned to the theatre; but it will be readily believed that it was only a powerful effort of reason over his distraction that had enabled him to recover; or perhaps — for the heart is so constituted — he found it impossible even to remain much longer separated from the presence of one who had broken his heart.

Madame was finishing her figure. She saw, but did not look at him; and he, irritated and furious, turned his back upon her as she passed him, escorted by her nymphs and followed by a hundred flatterers. During

this time, at the other end of the theatre, near the lake, a young woman was seated with her eyes fixed upon one of the windows of the theatre, from which were issuing streams of light, — the window in question being that of the royal box. As De Guiche left the theatre for the purpose of getting into the fresh air he so much needed, he passed close to this lady and saluted her. When she on her part perceived the young man, she rose like a woman surprised in the midst of ideas she was desirous of concealing even from herself. De Guiche stopped as he recognized her, and said hurriedly, "Good-evening, Mademoiselle de la Vallière; I am indeed fortunate in meeting you."

"I also, Monsieur the Count, am glad of this accidental meeting," said the young girl, as she was about to withdraw.

"Pray do not leave me," said De Guiche, stretching out his hand towards her, "for you would thus be contradicting the kind words you have just pronounced. Remain, I implore you! The evening is most lovely; you wish to escape from this tumult, and prefer your own society. Well, I can understand it; all women who are possessed of any feeling do, and you never find them dull or lonely when removed from the giddy vortex of these exciting amusements. Oh, Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle!"

"What is the matter, Monsieur the Count?" inquired La Vallière, in some alarm; "you seem agitated."

"I? — oh, no!"

"Then will you allow me, M. de Guiche, to return you the thanks I had proposed to offer you on the very first opportunity. It is to your recommendation, I am aware, that I owe my admission among the number of Madame's maids of honor."

"Indeed! Ah! I remember now, and I congratulate myself, Mademoiselle. Do you love any one?"

"I!" exclaimed La Vallière.

"Forgive me! I hardly know what I am saying; a thousand times forgive me! Madame was right, quite right, — this brutal exile has completely turned my brain."

"And yet it seemed to me that the king received you with kindness, Monsieur the Count."

"Do you think so? Received me with kindness — perhaps so — yes —"

"There cannot be a doubt that he received you kindly, for in fact you have returned without his permission."

"Quite true, and I believe you are right, Mademoiselle. But have you not seen M. de Bragelonne here?"

La Vallière started at that name. "Why do you ask?" she inquired.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* have I offended you again?" said De Guiche. "In that case I am indeed unhappy, and greatly to be pitied."

"Yes, very unhappy, and very much to be pitied, M. de Guiche; for you seem to be suffering terribly."

"Oh, Mademoiselle, why have I not a devoted sister or a true friend?"

"You have friends, M. de Guiche; and M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne, of whom you spoke just now, is, I believe, one of them."

"Yes, yes, you are right; he is one of my best friends. Adieu, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, adieu;" and he fled like one possessed along the shore of the lake. His dark shadow glided, lengthening as it disappeared, among the blazing pyramids of lamps and the glittering undulations of the water. La Vallière looked after him compas-

sionately for some time, saying, "Yes, yes; he, too, is suffering, and I begin to understand why."

La Vallière had hardly finished when her companions, Mademoiselle de Montalais and Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, ran forward. They were released from their attendance, and had changed their costumes of nymphs. Delighted with the beautiful night and the success of the evening, they returned to look after their companion.

"What! already here?" they said to her. "We thought we should be the first at the rendezvous."

"I have been here this quarter of an hour," replied La Vallière.

"Did not the dancing amuse you?"

"No."

"But surely, the whole spectacle?"

"No more than the dancing. So far as a spectacle is concerned, I much prefer that which these dark woods present, in whose depths can be seen, now in one direction and again in another, a light passing by, — as though it were an eye bright red in color, sometimes open, at others closed."

"La Vallière is quite a poet," said Tonnay-Charente.

"In other words," said Montalais, "she is insupportable. Whenever there is a question of laughing a little or of amusing ourselves with anything, La Vallière begins to cry; whenever we girls have reason to cry, because perhaps we have mislaid our dresses, or because our vanity has been wounded, or our costume fails to produce any effect, La Vallière laughs."

"Oh! for my part, that is not my character," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente. "I am a woman, and there are few like me. Whoever loves me, flatters me; whoever flatters me, pleases me by his flattery; and whoever pleases me — "

"Well," said Montalais, "you do not finish."

"It is too difficult," replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, laughing loudly; "do you, who are so clever, finish for me."

"And you, Louise?" said Montalais, — "does any one please you?"

"That is a matter which concerns no one but myself," replied the young girl, rising from the mossy bank on which she had been reclining during the whole time the ballet had lasted. "Now, Mesdemoiselles, we have agreed to amuse ourselves to-night without any one to overlook us and without any escort. We are three in number, we like one another, and the night is lovely. Look yonder! do you not see the moon slowly rising in the heavens, silvering the topmost branches of the chestnuts and the oaks? Oh, beautiful walk! dear liberty! the beautiful soft turf of the woods, the happiness which your friendship confers upon me! Let us walk arm-in-arm towards those large trees. Out yonder all are at this moment seated at table and fully occupied, or preparing to adorn themselves for a set and formal promenade; horses are being saddled or harnessed to the carriages, — the queen's mules or Madame's four white ponies. As for ourselves, let us quickly reach some retired spot where no eye can see us and no step follow ours. Do you not remember, Montalais, the woods of Chaverny and of Chambord, the numberless poplars of Blois, where we exchanged many of our mutual hopes?"

"And many confidences also?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, "I also think a good deal, but I take care — "

"To say nothing," said Montalais; "so that when

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente thinks, Athenaïs is the only one who knows it."

"Hush!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de la Vallière; "I hear steps approaching from this side."

"Quick, quick, then, among the high reed-grass!" said Montalais. "Stoop, Athenaïs; you are so tall!"

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente stooped as she was told; and almost at the same moment they saw two gentlemen approaching, their heads bent down, walking arm-in-arm on the fine gravel walk running parallel with the bank. The young girls had indeed made themselves small, for nothing was to be seen of them.

"It is M. de Guiche," whispered Montalais in Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente's ear.

"It is M. de Bragelonne," whispered the latter in La Vallière's ear.

The two young men approached still closer, conversing in animated voices. "She was here just now," said the count. "If I had only seen her, I should have declared it to be an apparition; but I spoke to her."

"You are positive, then?"

"Yes; but perhaps, too, I frightened her."

"In what way?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* I was still half mad at you know what; so that she could hardly have understood what I was saying, and must have become alarmed."

"Oh," said Bragelonne, "do not make yourself uneasy, my friend! She is all kindness, and will excuse you; she is clear-sighted, and will understand."

"Yes; but if she should have understood, and understood too well, she may talk."

"You do not know Louise, Count," said Raoul. "Louise possesses every virtue, and has not a single

fault." The two young men passed on; and as they proceeded their voices were soon lost in the distance.

"How is it, La Vallière," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, "that M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne spoke of you as Louise?"

"We were brought up together," replied Mademoiselle de la Vallière; "we were children when we first knew each other."

"And then, M. de Bragelonne is your *fiancé*; every one knows that."

"Oh, no! I did not know it. Is that so, Mademoiselle?"

"That is to say," replied Louise, blushing, "M. de Bragelonne has honored me by asking my hand in marriage; but —"

"Well?"

"It seems the king will not consent to the marriage."

"Eh? Why the king? and what has the king to do with it?" exclaimed Aure, sharply. "Good gracious! has the king the right to interfere in matters of that kind? Politics are politics, as M. de Mazarin used to say; but love is love. If, therefore, you love M. de Bragelonne and he loves you, marry him; I give my consent."

Athenaïs began to laugh.

"Oh! I speak seriously," replied Montalais, "and my opinion in this case is quite as good as the king's, I suppose; is it not, Louise?"

"Come," said La Vallière, "these gentlemen have passed; let us profit by our being alone to cross the open ground and so take refuge in the woods."

"So much the better," said Athenaïs; "because I see the torches setting out from the château and the theatre, which seem as if they were preceding some persons of distinction."

"Let us run, then," said all three; and gracefully lifting up the long folds of their silk dresses, they ran lightly across the open space between the lake and the thickest covert of the park. Montalais, agile as a deer, and Athenaïs, eager as a young wolf, bounded through the dry grass; and now and then some bold Actæon might by the aid of the faint light have perceived their chaste and well-formed limbs somewhat displayed beneath the heavy folds of their satin petticoats. La Vallière, more refined and more bashful, allowed her dress to flow around her; retarded also by her lameness, it was not long before she called out to her companions to halt, and, left behind, she obliged them both to wait for her. At this moment a man concealed in a dry ditch full of young willow saplings scrambled quickly up its shelving side, and ran off in the direction of the château.

The three young girls, for their part, reached the outskirts of the park, every path of which they well knew. The ditches were bordered by high hedges full of flowers, which on that side protected the foot passengers from being intruded upon by the horses and carriages. In fact, the sound of Madame's and of the queen's carriages could be heard rolling in the distance upon the hard, dry ground of the roads. Many cavaliers followed, with the sound so well imitated by the rhythmic line of Virgil. Distant music was heard in response; and when the harmony died away, the nightingale, with his song full of pride, poured forth his melodious chants and his most complicated, learned, and sweet compositions to those who he perceived had met beneath the thick shade of the woods. Near the songster, in the dark background of the great trees, could be seen the glistening eyes of an owl attracted by the harmony. In this way the *fête* for the whole court was a *fête* also for the

mysterious inhabitants of the forest; for certainly the deer from the brake, the pheasant on the branch, the fox in its hole, were all listening. One could realize the life led by all this nocturnal and invisible population from the restless movements which suddenly took place among the leaves. Then our sylvan nymphs would utter a slight cry; but reassured immediately afterwards, they would laugh and resume their walk.

In this manner they reached the royal oak, — the venerable relic of an oak which in its youth had listened to the sighs of Henry II. for the beautiful Diana of Poitiers, and later still to those of Henry IV. for the lovely Gabrielle d'Estrées. Beneath this oak the gardeners had piled up the moss and turf in such a manner that never had a seat more luxurious offered repose to the wearied limbs of any monarch. The trunk of the tree, somewhat rough to recline against, was sufficiently large to accommodate the three young girls, whose voices were lost among the branches, which stretched downwards towards the trunk.

CHAPTER XLV.

WHAT WAS SAID UNDER THE ROYAL OAK.

THE softness of the air, the stillness of the foliage, tacitly imposed upon these young girls the need of changing immediately their trifling conversation for one of a more serious character. She, indeed, whose disposition was the most lively, — namely, Montalais, — was the first to yield to its influence; and she began by heaving a deep sigh, and saying, "What happiness to feel ourselves here alone and at liberty, with every right to be frank, especially towards each other!"

"Yes," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; "for the court, however brilliant it may be, has always some falsehood concealed beneath the folds of its velvet robes or beneath the blaze of its diamonds."

"I," replied La Vallière, — "I never tell a falsehood; when I cannot speak the truth, I remain silent."

"You will not remain long in favor, my dear," said Montalais. "It is not here as it was at Blois, where we told the Dowager Madame all our little annoyances and all our longings. There were certain days when Madame remembered that she herself had been young, and on those days whoever talked with her found in her a sincere friend. She related to us her flirtations with Monsieur, and we told her of the flirtations she had had with others, or at least the rumors of them which had been spread abroad. Poor woman, so simple-minded! she laughed at them, as we did. Where is she now?"

"Ah, Montalais, laughter-loving Montalais!" cried La Vallière; "you see that you are sighing again. The woods inspire you, and you are almost reasonable this evening."

"Mesdemoiselles," said Athenaïs, "you ought not to regret the court at Blois so much, unless you do not feel happy with us. A court is a place where men and women resort to talk of matters which mothers, guardians, and especially confessors so severely denounce. At court they talk of such things by the indulgence of the king and the queens; is not that pleasant?"

"Oh, Athenaïs!" said Louise, blushing.

"Athenaïs is frank to-night," said Montalais; "let us avail ourselves of it."

"Yes, let us take advantage of it; for this evening I could divulge the dearest secrets of my heart."

"Ah, if M. de Montespan were here!" said Montalais.

"Do you think that I care for M. de Montespan?" murmured the beautiful young girl.

"He is handsome, I believe?"

"Yes; and that is no small advantage in my eyes."

"There now, you see—"

"I will go further, and say that, of all the men whom one sees here, he is the handsomest and the most—"

"What was that?" said La Vallière, starting suddenly from the mossy bank.

"A deer which is hurrying through the branches."

"I am only afraid of men," said Athenaïs.

"When they do not resemble M. de Montespan."

"A truce to this raillery! M. de Montespan is attentive to me, but that does not commit me in any way. Is not M. de Guiche here,—he who is so devoted to Madame?"

"Poor fellow!" said La Vallière.

"Why poor? Madame is sufficiently beautiful, and of sufficiently high rank, I suppose?"

La Vallière shook her head sorrowfully, saying, "When one loves, it is neither beauty nor rank; my dear friends, when one loves, it should be the heart, or the eyes only, of him or of her who is loved."

Montalais began to laugh loudly. "Heart, eyes!" she said; "oh, sugar-plums!"

"I speak for myself," replied La Vallière.

"Noble sentiments," said Athenaïs, with an air of protection, but with indifference.

"Are they not your own, Mademoiselle?" said Louise.

"Perfectly so; but, to continue, how can one pity a man who bestows his attentions upon such a woman as Madame? If any disproportion exists, it is on the count's side."

"Oh, no, no!" returned La Vallière; "it is on Madame's side."

"Explain yourself."

"I will. Madame has not even a wish to know what love is. She diverts herself with the feeling, as children do with fireworks, of which a spark might set a palace on fire. It makes a display, and that is all she cares about. Besides, pleasure and love form the tissue of which she wishes her life to be woven. M. de Guiche will love this illustrious lady, but she will never love him."

Athenaïs laughed disdainfully. "Do people really love?" she said. "Where are the noble sentiments which you just now uttered? Does not a woman's virtue consist in the courageous refusal of every intrigue which might compromise her? A properly regulated woman, endowed with a generous heart, ought to look at men, make herself loved, adored even, by them, and say, at the very utmost, once in her life, 'I begin to think that I ought not to have been what I am; I should have detested this one less than others.'"

"Therefore," exclaimed La Vallière, clasping her hands, "that is what M. de Montespan has to expect."

"Certainly, — he as well as every one else. What! have I not said that I admit he possesses a certain superiority, and would not that be enough? My dear, a woman is a queen during the whole period in which Nature permits her to enjoy sovereign power, — from fifteen to thirty-five years of age. After that, we are free to have a heart, when we have only that left."

"Oh, oh!" murmured La Vallière.

"Excellent!" cried Montalais; "a wife and mistress combined in one! Athenaïs, you will make your way in the world."

"Do you not approve of what I say?"

"Completely," replied her laughing companion.

"You are not serious, Montalais?" said Louise.

"Yes, yes; I approve everything Athenaïs has just said; only — "

"Only what?"

"Well, I cannot carry it out. I have the firmest principles; I form resolutions beside which the laws of the Stadtholder and of the King of Spain are child's play; but when the moment arrives to put them into execution, nothing comes of them."

"Your courage fails," said Athenaïs, scornfully.

"Miserably."

"Unfortunate nature!" returned Athenaïs. "But at least you make a choice."

"Why, no, really. It pleases fate to disappoint me in everything: I dream of emperors, and I find only — "

"Aure, Aure!" exclaimed La Vallière, "for pity's sake, do not, for the pleasure of saying something witty, sacrifice those who love you with such devoted affection."

"Oh, I do not trouble myself much about that! Those

who love me are sufficiently happy that I do not dismiss them altogether, my dear. So much the worse for myself if I have a weakness for any one; but so much the worse for others if I revenge myself upon them for it, — and upon my word so I do."

"You are right," said Athenaïs, "and perhaps you, too, will reach the same goal; in other words, Mesdemoiselles, that is termed being a coquette. Men, who are very silly in most things, are particularly so in confounding, under the term coquetry, a woman's pride and her varying moods. I, for instance, am proud, — that is to say, impregnable; I treat my admirers harshly, but without any pretension to retain them. Men call me a coquette, because they are vain enough to think that I care for them. Other women — Montalais, for instance — have allowed themselves to be influenced by flattery; they would be lost were it not for that most fortunate principle of instinct which urges them to change suddenly, and punish the man whose devotion they so recently accepted."

"A very learned dissertation," said Montalais, in the tone of thorough enjoyment.

"It is odious!" murmured Louise.

"Thanks to this sort of coquetry, — for indeed that is genuine coquetry," continued Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, — "the lover who a little while since was puffed up with pride, a minute later is suffering at every pore of his vanity and self-esteem. He was already beginning to assume the airs of a conqueror, but now he recedes; he was about to assume an air of protection towards us, but he is obliged to prostrate himself anew. The result of all which is that instead of having a husband who is jealous and troublesome and too familiar, we have a lover always trembling in our presence, always longing, and always submissive; and for this simple reason, — that

he finds the same woman never the same. Be convinced, Mesdemoiselles, therefore, of the advantages of coquetry. Possessing that, one reigns a queen among women in cases where Providence has withheld that precious faculty of holding one's heart and mind in check."

"Oh, how clever you are," said Montalais, "and how well you understand the duty women owe themselves!"

"I am only settling a case of individual happiness," said Athenaïs, modestly, "and defending myself, like all weak, loving dispositions, against the oppression of the stronger."

"La Vallière does not say a word."

"Does she not approve of what we are saying?"

"Nay; only I do not understand it," said Louise. "You talk like those who would not be called upon to live in this world of ours."

"And very pretty your world is," said Montalais.

"A world," returned Athenaïs, "in which men worship a woman to make her fall in her bewilderment, and insult her when she has fallen."

"Who spoke to you of falling?" said Louise.

"Yours is a new theory, then, my dear. Will you tell us how you intend to resist yielding to temptation, if you allow yourself to be hurried away by love?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the young girl, raising towards the dark heavens her beautiful eyes filled with tears, "if you did but know what a heart was, I would explain, and would convince you! A loving heart is stronger than all your coquetry, and more powerful than all your pride. A woman is never truly loved, I believe, and God is my witness; a man never loves with idolatry, except he feel himself loved in return. Let old men, whom we read of in comedies, fancy themselves adored by coquettes. A young man is conscious of it, and does not delude himself; if he has a fancy or a strong desire or an absorb-

ing passion for a coquette, — you see I give a free field and a broad one, — in a word, a coquette may drive him out of his senses, but will never make him fall in love. Love, such as I conceive it to be, is an incessant, complete, and perfect sacrifice; but it is not the sacrifice of one only of the two persons who are united. It is the perfect abnegation of two souls who are desirous of blending into one. If I ever love, I shall implore my lover to leave me free and pure. I will tell him — what he will understand — that my heart is torn by my refusal; and he in his love for me, aware of the magnitude of my sacrifice, — he in his turn, I say, will show his devotion for me, will respect me, and will not seek my ruin, or insult me when I shall have fallen, as you said just now, when uttering your blasphemies against love such as I understand it. That is my idea of love. And now you will tell me, perhaps, that my lover will despise me. I defy him to do so, unless he be the vilest of men; and my heart assures me that it is not such a man I should choose. A look from me will repay him for the sacrifices he makes, or it will inspire him with virtues which he would never think he possessed."

"But, Louise," exclaimed Montalais, "you tell us this, and do not carry it into practice."

"What do you mean?"

"You are adored by Raoul de Bragelonne, who worships you on both his knees. The poor fellow is made the victim of your virtue, just as he would be — nay, more than he would be, even — of my coquetry or of Athenaïs's pride."

"This is simply a different shade of coquetry," said Athenaïs; "and Mademoiselle, I perceive, is a coquette without knowing it."

"Oh!" said La Vallière.

"Yes, you may call it instinct, if you please, keenest sensibility, exquisite refinement of feeling, perpetual display of outbursts of passion which end in nothing. Oh, it is very artful too, and very effective! I should even, now that I reflect upon it, have preferred this system of tactics to my own pride, for waging war with men, because it offers the advantage sometimes of thoroughly convincing them; but at the present moment, without utterly condemning myself, I declare it to be superior to the simple coquetry of Montalais;" and the two young girls began to laugh.

La Vallière alone preserved silence, and quietly shook her head. Then, a moment after, she added, "If you were to tell me in the presence of a man but a fourth part of what you have just said, or even if I were assured that you think it, I should die of shame and grief upon this spot."

"Very well, die, poor tender little darling!" replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; "for if there are no men here, there are at least two women, your own friends, who declare you to be attainted and convicted of being a coquette from instinct, a born coquette, — in other words, the most dangerous kind of coquette which exists in the world."

"Oh, Mesdemoiselles," replied La Vallière, blushing, and almost ready to weep. Her two companions again burst out laughing.

"Very well! I shall ask Bragelonne for information."

"Bragelonne?" said Athenaïs.

"Yes! that great fellow who is as courageous as Cæsar and as clever and witty as M. Fouquet; that poor fellow who for twelve years has known you, loved you, and yet — one can hardly believe it — has never even kissed the tips of your fingers."

"Explain to us this cruelty, — you who are all heart," said Athenaïs to La Vallière.

"I will explain it by a single word, — virtue. You will perhaps deny the existence of virtue?"

"Come, Louise, tell us the truth," said Aure, taking her by the hand.

"But what do you wish me to tell you?" cried La Vallière.

"Whatever you like; but it will be useless for you to say anything, for I persist in my opinion of you, — a coquette from instinct, a born coquette; in other words, as I have already said, and I say it again, the most dangerous of all coquettes!"

"Oh, no, no! for pity's sake, do not believe that!"

"What! twelve years of extreme severity?"

"Why, twelve years ago I was only five years old! The freedom of the child cannot, surely, be added to the young girl's account."

"Well, you are now seventeen, — three years instead of twelve. During those three years you have remained constantly and unchangeably cruel. Against you are arrayed the silent shades of Blois, the meetings when you diligently conned the stars together, the evening wanderings beneath the plane-trees, his impassioned twenty years speaking to your fourteen years, the fire of his glances addressed to yourself."

"Yes, yes; but so it is!"

"Nonsense! impossible!"

"But, *mon Dieu!* why impossible?"

"Tell us something credible, my dear, and we will believe you."

"Yet if you were to suppose one thing —"

"What is that?"

"Out with it, or we shall suppose much more than you like!"

"Suppose, then, that I thought I was in love, and that I am not."

"What! not in love?"

"If I have acted in a different manner from that of others when they are in love, it is because I do not love, and because my hour has not yet come."

"Louise, Louise," said Montalais, "take care, or I shall remind you of the remark you made just now! Raoul is not here; do not overwhelm him while he is absent. Be charitable; and if on closer inspection you think you do not love him, tell him so, poor fellow!" and she began to laugh.

"Louise pitied M. de Guiche just now," said Athenaïs; "would it be possible to detect the explanation of the indifference for the one in this compassion for the other?"

"Say what you please, Mesdemoiselles," said La Vallière, sadly; "upbraid me as you like, since you do not understand me."

"Oh, oh!" replied Montalais; "temper, sorrow, and tears! We are laughing, Louise, and are not, I assure you, quite the monsters you suppose. Look at the proud Athenaïs, as she is called: she does not love M. de Montespan, it is true; but she would be in despair if M. de Montespan were not to love her. Look at me: I laugh at M. Malicorne, but the poor fellow whom I laugh at knows very well when he may be permitted to press his lips upon my hand. And yet the eldest of us is not twenty yet. What a future for us!"

"Silly, silly girls!" murmured Louise.

"You are quite right," said Montalais; "and you alone have spoken words of wisdom."

"Certainly."

"I do not dispute it," replied Athenaïs. "And so you positively do not love poor M. de Bragelonne?"

"Perhaps she does," said Montalais; "she is not yet quite sure of it. But in any case listen, Athenaïs: if M. de Bragelonne becomes free, I will give you a little friendly advice."

"What is that?"

"To look at him well before you decide in favor of M. de Montespan."

"Oh! in that way of considering the subject, my dear, M. de Bragelonne is not the only person whom one could look at with pleasure. M. de Guiche, for instance, has his value also."

"He did not distinguish himself this evening," said Montalais, "and I know from very good authority that Madame thought him unbearable."

"But M. de Saint-Aignan produced a most brilliant effect, and I am sure that more than one person who saw him dance this evening will not soon forget him. Do you not think so, La Vallière?"

"Why do you ask me? I did not see him, nor do I know him."

"What! you did not see M. de Saint-Aignan, you do not know him?"

"No."

"Come, come! do not affect a virtue more extravagantly excessive than our boldness! You have eyes, I suppose?"

"Excellent."

"Then you must have seen all those who danced this evening."

"Yes, nearly all."

"That is a very impertinent 'nearly all' for some."

"You must take it for what it is worth."

"Very well; now, among all those gentlemen whom you 'nearly all' saw, which do you prefer?"

"Yes," said Montalais; "is it M. de Saint-Aignan, or M. de Guiche, or M. —"

"I prefer no one; I thought them all about the same."

"Do you mean, then, that among all that brilliant assembly — the first court in the world — no one pleased you?"

"I do not say that."

"Tell us, then, who your ideal is."

"It is not an ideal being."

"He exists, then?"

"In very truth, Mesdemoiselles," exclaimed La Vallière, aroused and excited, "I cannot understand you at all! What! you who have a heart as I have, eyes as I have, and yet you speak of M. de Guiche and of M. de Saint-Aignan when the king was there!"

These words, uttered so precipitately and in an agitated, fervid voice, made her two companions between whom she was seated exclaim together, in a manner which terrified her, "The king!"

La Vallière buried her face in her hands. "Yes," she murmured, "the king! the king! Have you ever seen any one to be compared to the king?"

"You were right just now in saying you had excellent eyes, Mademoiselle; for you see a great distance, — too far, indeed. Alas! the king is not one upon whom our poor eyes have a right to be fixed."

"That is too true!" cried La Vallière. "It is not the privilege of all eyes to gaze upon the sun; but I will look upon him, even were I to be blinded in doing so."

At this moment, and as though caused by the words which had just escaped La Vallière's lips, a rustling of leaves and of that which sounded like some silken mateeard behind the adjoining bush. The young girls

hastily rose, almost terrified out of their senses. They distinctly saw the leaves move, but could not tell what it was that stirred them.

"It is a wolf or a wild boar!" cried Montalais; "fly! Mesdemoiselles, fly!"

The three girls, a prey to unspeakable terror, fled by the first path which presented itself, and did not stop until they had reached the verge of the wood. There, breathless, leaning against one another, feeling one another's hearts throb wildly, they endeavored to collect their senses, but could only succeed in doing so after the lapse of some minutes. Perceiving at last the lights from the windows of the château, they decided to walk towards them. La Vallière was exhausted with fatigue, and Aure and Athenaïs were obliged to support her.

"Oh, we have escaped well!" said Montalais.

"Mesdemoiselles," said La Vallière, "I am greatly afraid that it was something worse than a wolf. For my part, and I speak as I think, I should have preferred to run the risk of being devoured alive by some wild animal than to be listened to and overheard. Fool, fool, that I am! How could I have thought, how could I have said such things!" and saying this, her head bowed like a reed; she felt her limbs fail, and, all her strength abandoning her, she glided almost inanimate from the arms of her companions, and sank down upon the grass.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE KING'S UNEASINESS.

Let us leave poor La Vallière, half fainting in the arms of her two companions, and return to the neighborhood of the royal oak. The three young girls had hardly run twenty paces, when the sound which had so much alarmed them was renewed among the branches. A man's figure might indistinctly be perceived, and putting the branches of the bushes aside he appeared upon the verge of the wood, and perceiving that the place was empty burst out into a peal of laughter. It is useless to say that the form in question was that of a young and handsome man, who made a sign to another, who thereupon made his appearance.

"Well, Sire," said the second figure, advancing timidly, "has your Majesty put our young sentimentalists to flight?"

"It seems so," said the king, "and you can show yourself without fear, Saint-Aignan."

"But, Sire, take care! you will be recognized."

"But I tell you they have gone."

"This is a most fortunate meeting, Sire; and if I dared offer an opinion to your Majesty, we ought to follow them."

"They are far away by this time."

"Bah! they would easily allow themselves to be overtaken, especially if they knew who were following them."

"What do you mean by that, Monsieur coxcomb?"

"Why, one of them seems to have taken a fancy to me, and another compared you to the sun."

"The greater reason why we should not show ourselves, Saint-Aignan. The sun does not show himself in the night-time."

"Upon my word, Sire, your Majesty seems to have very little curiosity. In your place, I should like to know who are the two nymphs, the two dryads, the two hamadryads, who have so good an opinion of us."

"Oh, I shall know them again very well, I assure you, without running after them."

"By what means?"

"By their voices, of course. They belong to the court, and the one who spoke of me had a very sweet voice."

"Ah! your Majesty permits yourself to be influenced by flattery."

"No one will ever say it is a means you make use of."

"Forgive my stupidity, Sire!"

"Come; let us go and look where I told you."

"Is the passion, then, which your Majesty confided to me already forgotten?"

"Oh, no, indeed! How is it possible to forget such beautiful eyes as those of Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Yet the other had so sweet a voice."

"Which one?"

"She who has fallen in love with the sun."

"M. de Saint-Aignan!"

"Forgive me, Sire."

"Well, I am not sorry you should believe me to be an admirer of sweet voices as well as of beautiful eyes. I know you to be a terrible talker, and to-morrow I shall have to pay for the confidence I have shown you."

"What do you mean, Sire?"

"I mean that to-morrow every one will know that I

have designs upon this little La Vallière; but be careful, Saint-Aignan! I have confided my secret to no one but you; and if any one should speak to me about it, I shall know who has betrayed my secret."

"You are angry, Sire!"

"No; but you understand that I do not wish to compromise the poor girl."

"Do not be afraid, Sire."

"You promise me, then?"

"Sire, I give you my word of honor."

"Excellent," thought the king, laughing to himself; "now every one will know to-morrow that I have been running about after La Vallière to-night." Then, endeavoring to see where he was, he said, "Why, we have lost ourselves."

"Not quite so bad as that."

"Where does that gate lead?"

"To Rond-Point, Sire."

"Where we were going when we heard the sound of women's voices?"

"Yes, Sire, and the termination of a conversation in which I had the honor of hearing my own name pronounced by the side of your Majesty's."

"You return to that subject very frequently, Saint-Aignan."

"Your Majesty will forgive me, but I am delighted to know that a woman exists whose thoughts are occupied about me without my knowledge and without my having done anything to deserve it. Your Majesty cannot comprehend this satisfaction, for your rank and merit attract attention and compel regard."

"No, no, Saint-Aignan, believe me or not, as you like," said the king, leaning familiarly upon De Saint-Aignan's arm, and taking the path which he thought ought to lead

him to the château; "but this candid confession, this perfectly disinterested preference of a woman who will perhaps never attract my attention, — in one word, the mystery of this adventure excites me; and the truth is that if I were not so taken up with La Vallière — "

"Do not let that interfere with your Majesty's intentions; you have time enough before you."

"What do you mean?"

"La Vallière is said to be very strict in her ideas."

"You excite my curiosity, De Saint-Aignan, and I am anxious to find her again. Come, let us walk on."

The king spoke untruly, — for nothing, on the contrary, troubled him less; but he had a part to play, and so he walked on hurriedly.

De Saint-Aignan followed him at a short distance. Suddenly the king stopped; the courtier followed his example. "Saint-Aignan," he said, "do you not hear some one moaning? Listen!"

"Yes; and crying, too, it seems."

"It is in this direction," said the king, pointing.

"It sounds like the tears and sobs of a woman," said M. de Saint-Aignan.

"Let us run!" and the king and the favorite, following a by-path, ran across the grass. As they gradually approached, the cries were more distinctly heard.

"Help! help!" exclaimed two voices. The young men redoubled their speed; and as they approached nearer, the sobs they had heard were changed into cries. "Help! help!" was again repeated; at the sound of which the king and his companion increased the rapidity of their pace. Suddenly, at the other side of a ditch, under the drooping branches of a willow, they perceived a woman on her knees, holding another in her arms, who seemed to have fainted. A few paces from them, a third, standing in the

middle of the path, was calling for assistance. Perceiving two gentlemen, whose rank she could not tell, her cries for assistance were redoubled. The king, who was in advance of his companion, leaped across the ditch, and reached the group at the very moment when from the end of the path which led to the château a dozen persons were approaching, who had been drawn to the spot by the same cries which had attracted the king and M. de Saint-Aignan.

"What is the matter, Mesdemoiselles?" inquired Louis.

"The king!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Montalais, in her astonishment failing to support La Vallière's head; so that the latter fell full length upon the ground.

"Yes, it is the king; but that is no reason why you should abandon your companion. Who is she?"

"It is Mademoiselle de la Vallière, Sire."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière!"

"Yes, Sire; she has just fainted."

"Poor child!" said the king. "Quick, quick! fetch a surgeon!"

But however great the anxiety with which the king had pronounced these words, he had not so carefully watched over himself that they did not appear, as well as the gesture which accompanied them, somewhat cold to M. de Saint-Aignan, to whom the king had confided the great love with which she had inspired him.

"Saint-Aignan," continued the king, "watch over Mademoiselle de la Vallière, I beg. Send for a surgeon. I will hasten forward and inform Madame of the accident which has befallen one of her maids of honor;" and in fact, while M. de Saint-Aignan was busily engaged in making preparations for carrying Mademoiselle de la Vallière to the château, the king hurried forward, happy to have an opportunity of approaching Madame, and of

speaking to her under some plausible pretext. Fortunately, a carriage was passing. The coachman was told to stop; and the persons who were inside, having been informed of the accident, eagerly gave up their seats to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. The current of fresh air produced by the rapid motion of the carriage soon recalled the invalid to her senses. Having reached the château, she was able, though very weak, to alight from the carriage and, with the assistance of Athenaïs and Montalais, to reach the inner apartments. They made her sit down in a room adjoining the drawing-rooms on the ground floor. After a while, as the accident had not produced much effect upon the promenaders, the promenade was resumed. During this time the king had found Madame beneath a tree, and had seated himself by her side; and his foot gently sought that of the princess beneath her chair.

"Take care, Sire!" said Henrietta to him, in a low tone; "you do not show yourself as indifferent as you should be."

"Alas!" replied Louis XIV., in the same tone, "I much fear that we have entered into an agreement above our strength to keep." He then added aloud, "You have heard of the accident, I suppose?"

"What accident?"

"Oh! in seeing you I forgot that I had come expressly to tell you of it. I am, however, painfully affected by it. One of your maids of honor, poor Mademoiselle de la Vallière, has just fainted."

"Indeed! poor girl!" said the princess, quietly; "what was the cause of it?" She then added in an [illegible] "You forget, Sire, that you wish others to b[illegible] passion for this girl, and yet you remain [illegible] is almost dying, perhaps, elsewhere."

"Ah, Madame," said the king, sighing, "how much more perfect you are in your part than I am, and how well you think of everything!" He then rose, saying loud enough for every one to hear him, "Permit me to leave you, Madame; my uneasiness is very great, and I wish to be quite certain myself that proper attention has been paid." The king left to return again to La Vallière; while all those who had been present commented upon the king's remark, "My uneasiness is very great."

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE KING'S SECRET.

On his way Louis met the Comte de Saint-Aignan. "Well, Saint-Aignan," he inquired, with affected interest, "how is the invalid?"

"Really, Sire," stammered De Saint-Aignan, "to my shame, I confess I do not know."

"What! you do not know?" said the king, pretending to take in a serious manner this want of attention to the object of his predilection.

"Will your Majesty pardon me? but I have just met one of our three loquacious wood-nymphs, and I confess that my attention has been taken away from other matters."

"Ah!" said the king, eagerly, "you have found, then—"

"The one who deigned to speak of me in such advantageous terms; and having found mine, I was searching for yours, Sire, when I had the happiness to meet your Majesty."

"Very well; but Mademoiselle de la Vallière before everything else," said the king, faithful to his part.

"Oh, our charming invalid!" said De Saint-Aignan; "how fortunately her fainting came on, since your Majesty had already occupied yourself about her!"

"What is the name of your fair lady, Saint-Aignan? Is it a secret?"

"Sire, it ought to be a secret, and a very great one, even; but your Majesty is well aware that no secret can possibly exist for you."

"Well, what is her name?"

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Is she pretty?"

"Exceedingly so, Sire; and I recognized the voice which pronounced my name in such tender accents. I then accosted her, questioned her as well as I was able to do, in the midst of the crowd; and she told me, without suspecting anything, that a little while ago she was under the great oak, with her two friends, when the appearance of a wolf or a robber had terrified them, and made them run away."

"But," inquired the king, eagerly, "what are the names of these two friends?"

"Sire," said De Saint-Aignan, "will your Majesty send me forthwith to the Bastille?"

"What for?"

"Because I am an egotist and a fool. My surprise was so great at such a conquest and at so fortunate a discovery that I went no further in my inquiries. Besides, I did not think that your Majesty would attach any very great importance to what you heard, preoccupied as you were with Mademoiselle de la Vallière; and then Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente left me suddenly, to return to Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Let us hope, then, that I shall be as fortunate as yourself. Come, Saint-Aignan!"

"Your Majesty is ambitious, I perceive, and does not wish to allow any conquest to escape you. I assure you that I will conscientiously set about my inquiries; and, moreover, from one of the three Graces we shall learn the names of the others, and by the name the secret."

"I, too," said the king, "only require to hear her voice to know it again. Come, let us say no more about it, but show me where poor La Vallière is."

"Well," thought De Saint-Aignan, "the king's regard is beginning to display itself, and for that girl too! It is extraordinary; I should never have believed it." With this thought passing in his mind, he showed the king the room where La Vallière had been taken. The king entered, followed by De Saint-Aignan. In a low room, near a large window looking out upon the gardens, La Vallière, reclining in a large arm-chair, inhaled in deep draughts the balmy evening breeze. From the loosened body of her dress the lace fell in tumbled folds, mingling with the tresses of her beautiful fair hair, which lay scattered upon her shoulders. Her languishing eyes were filled with tears, though their fire was not wholly extinguished; she seemed as lifeless as those beautiful visions of our dreams, pale and romantic, which pass before the closed eyes of the sleeper, half opening their wings without moving them, unclosing their lips without a sound escaping them. The pearl-like pallor of La Vallière possessed a charm which it would be impossible to describe. Mental and bodily suffering had produced upon her features a soft and noble expression of grief; from the perfect passiveness of her arms and bust, she resembled one whose soul had passed away more than a living being, — she seemed not to hear either the whisperings of her companions or the distant murmurs which arose from the neighborhood. She seemed to be communing within herself; and her beautiful, slender, and delicate hands trembled from time to time, as though from the contact of some invisible touch.

La Vallière was so completely absorbed in her reverie, that the king entered without her perceiving him. At a

distance he gazed upon her lovely face, upon which the moon shed its pure silvery light. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed, with a terror which he could not control; "she is dead."

"No, Sire," said Montalais, in a low voice; "on the contrary, she is better. Are you not better, Louise?"

But Louise did not answer. "Louise," continued Montalais, "the king has deigned to express his anxiety concerning your health."

"The king!" exclaimed Louise, starting up abruptly, as if a stream of fire had darted through her frame to her heart; "the king uneasy about my health!"

"Yes," said Montalais.

"The king is here, then?" said La Vallière, not venturing to look round her.

"That voice! that voice!" whispered Louis, eagerly, to De Saint-Aignan.

"Yes, it is so," replied De Saint-Aignan. "Your Majesty is right; it is she who declared her love for the sun."

"Hush!" said the king. And then approaching La Vallière, he said, "You are not well, Mademoiselle? Just now, indeed, in the park, I saw that you had fainted. How were you attacked?"

"Sire," stammered the poor child, pale and trembling, "I cannot tell."

"You have been walking too much," said the king; "and fatigue, perhaps—"

"No, Sire," said Montalais, eagerly, answering for her friend, "it could not be from fatigue, for we passed part of the evening seated under the royal oak."

"Under the royal oak?" returned the king, starting. "I was not deceived, — it is as I thought;" and he directed a look of intelligence at the count.

"Yes," said De Saint-Aignan, "under the royal oak, with Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"How do you know that?" inquired Montalais.

"In a very simple way. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente told me so."

"In that case she must have told you the cause of Mademoiselle de la Vallière's fainting?"

"Why, yes; she told me something about a wolf or a robber, — I forget precisely which." La Vallière listened, her eyes fixed, her bosom heaving, as if, gifted with more than ordinary acuteness of perception, she divined a portion of the truth.

Louis imagined this attitude and agitation to be the consequences of a terror but partially removed. "Nay, fear nothing, Mademoiselle," he said, with a rising emotion which he could not conceal; "the wolf which terrified you so much was simply a wolf with two legs."

"It was a man!" screamed Louise; "it was a man who was listening?"

"Suppose it were, Mademoiselle, what great evil was there in his having listened? Is it likely that even in your own opinion you would have said anything which should not have been listened to?"

La Vallière wrung her hands, and hid her face in them, as if to hide her blushes. "In Heaven's name," she said, "who was concealed there, — who was listening?"

The king advanced towards her, to take hold of one of her hands. "It was I, Mademoiselle," he said, bowing with tender respect. "Could I frighten you?"

La Vallière uttered a loud cry; for the second time her strength forsook her, and cold, moaning, and in utter despair, she again fell apparently lifeless in her chair. The king had just time to hold out his arm, so that she was partially supported by him. Mesdemoiselles de Ton-

nay-Charente and de Montalais, who stood a few paces from the king and La Vallière, motionless and almost petrified at the recollection of their conversation with La Vallière, did not think even of offering their assistance to her, feeling restrained by the presence of the king, who with one knee on the ground held La Vallière round the waist with his arm.

"You heard, Sire?" murmured Athenaïs. But the king did not reply; he had his eyes fixed upon La Vallière's half-closed eyes, and held her drooping hand in his own.

"Of course," replied De Saint-Aignan, who on his side, hoping that Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente would faint, advanced towards her, holding his arms extended, — "of course; we did not even lose a word." But the haughty Athenaïs was not a woman to faint so easily; she darted a terrible look at De Saint-Aignan and fled. Montalais, with more courage, advanced hurriedly towards Louise, and received her from the king's hands, who was already fast losing his presence of mind, as he felt his face covered by the perfumed tresses of the seemingly dying girl. "Excellent!" said De Saint-Aignan. "This is indeed an adventure; and it will be my own fault if I am not the first to relate it."

The king approached him, and with a trembling voice and a passionate gesture said, "Not a syllable, Count!"

The poor king forgot that only an hour before he had given the same man a similar recommendation, but with the very opposite intention, — namely, that the man should be indiscreet. But the latter recommendation was quite as unnecessary as the former. Half an hour afterwards all Fontainebleau knew that Mademoiselle de la Vallière had had a conversation under the royal oak with Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, and that in this conver-

sation she had confessed her love for the king. It was known, also, that the king, after having manifested the uneasiness with which the state of Mademoiselle de la Vallière's health had inspired him, had turned pale and trembled very much as he received the beautiful girl fainting in his arms; so that it was quite agreed among the courtiers that the greatest event of the period had just transpired, — that his Majesty loved Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and that consequently Monsieur could now sleep in perfect tranquillity. It was this, even, that the queen-mother, as surprised as the others by this sudden change, hastened to tell the young queen and Philip of Orléans. Only she set to work in a different manner, by attacking these two interested persons in the following way. To her daughter-in-law she said: "See now, Thérèse, how very wrong you were to accuse the king! Here they say he has given himself to-day a new mistress; why should there be any greater truth in the report of to-day than in that of yesterday, or in that of yesterday than in that of to-day?" To Monsieur, in relating to him the adventure of the royal oak, she said: "Are you not very absurd in your jealousies, my dear Philip? It is asserted that the king has lost his head over that little La Vallière. Say nothing of it to your wife; the queen would know it immediately."

This latter confidential communication had its natural result. Monsieur, who had regained his composure, went triumphantly to look after his wife; and as it was not yet midnight, and the *fête* was to continue until two in the morning, he offered her his hand for a promenade. At the end of a few paces, however, the first thing he did was to disobey his mother. "Do not go and tell any one, the queen least of all," he said mysteriously, "what people say about the king."

"What do they say about him?" inquired Madame.

"That my brother has suddenly been smitten with a strange passion."

"For whom?"

"For that little La Vallière." As it was dark, Madame could smile at her ease. "Ah!" she said, "and how long is it since this has been the case?"

"For some days, so it seems. But that was nothing but smoke, and it is only this evening that the flames of his passion have been revealed."

"The king shows his good taste," said Madame, "and in my opinion she is a very charming girl."

"I verily believe you are jesting, my dear."

"I! In what way?"

"In any case this passion will make some one very happy, even if it be only La Vallière herself."

"Really," continued the princess, "you speak, Monsieur, as if you had read into the inmost recesses of my maid-of-honor's heart. Who has told you that she agrees to return the king's affection?"

"And who has told you that she will not return it?"

"She loves the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"You think so."

"She is even affianced to him."

"She was so."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, when they went to ask the king's permission to arrange the marriage, he refused his permission."

"Refused?"

"Yes, even to the Comte de la Fère himself, whom the king honors, you know, with the greatest regard, on account of the part he took in your brother's restoration, and in other events, also, which happened a long time ago."

"Well, the poor lovers must wait until the king is

pleased to change his opinion; they are young, and there is time enough."

"But, my love," said Philip, laughing, "I perceive that you do not know the best part of the affair."

"No!"

"That by which the king was most deeply touched."

"The king, do you say, has been deeply touched?"

"To the very heart."

"But how, — in what manner? Tell me directly."

"By an adventure the romance of which cannot be surpassed."

"You know how I love such adventures, and yet you keep me waiting," said the princess, impatiently.

"Well, then — " and Monsieur paused.

"I am listening."

"Under the royal oak, — you know where the royal oak is?"

"What can that matter? Under the royal oak, you were saying — "

"Well! Mademoiselle de la Vallière, fancying herself alone with her two friends, revealed to them her passion for the king."

"Ah!" said Madame, beginning to be uneasy, "her passion for the king?"

"Yes."

"When was this?"

"About an hour ago."

Madame started, and then said, "And no one knew of this passion?"

"No one."

"Not even his Majesty?"

"Not even his Majesty. The little creature kept her secret most strictly to herself, when suddenly it proved stronger than herself, and so escaped her."

"And from whom did you get this absurd tale?"

"Why, as everybody else did, from La Vallière herself, who confessed her love to Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, who were her companions."

Madame stopped, and by a hasty movement dropped her husband's hand.

"Did you say it was an hour ago she made this confession?" Madame inquired.

"About that time."

"Is the king aware of it?"

"Why, that is the very thing which constitutes the romance of the affair, for the king was behind the royal oak with De Saint-Aignan, and he heard the whole of the interesting conversation without losing a single word of it."

Madame felt struck to the heart, saying incautiously, "But I have seen the king since, and he never told me a word about it."

"Of course," said Monsieur, bluntly, as a triumphant husband, "he took care not to speak of it to you himself, since he recommended every one not to say a word about it to you."

"What do you mean?" said Madame, irritated.

"I mean that they wished to keep you in ignorance of the affair altogether."

"But why should they wish to conceal it from me?"

"From the fear that your friendship for the young queen might induce you to say something about it to her; that is all."

Madame hung down her head; her feelings were grievously wounded. She could not enjoy a moment's repose until she had met the king. As a king is, most naturally, the very last person in his kingdom who knows what is said about him, in the same way that a lover is

the only one who is kept in ignorance of what is said about his mistress; so, when the king perceived Madame, who was looking for him, he approached her somewhat disturbed, but still gracious and attentive in his manner. Madame waited for him to speak about La Vallière first; but as he did not speak of her, she inquired, "And the poor girl?"

"What poor girl?" said the king.

"La Vallière. Did you not tell me, Sire, that she had fainted?"

"She is still very ill," said the king, affecting the greatest indifference.

"But surely that will prejudicially affect the rumor you were going to spread, Sire?"

"What rumor?"

"That your attention was taken up by her."

"Oh," replied the king, carelessly, "I trust it will be reported all the same."

Madame still waited. She wished to know if the king would speak to her of the adventure of the royal oak; but the king did not say a word about it. Madame, on her side, did not open her lips about the adventure; so that the king took leave of her without having reposed the slightest confidence in her. Hardly had she seen the king move away, when she set out in search of De Saint-Aignan. De Saint-Aignan was never very difficult to find; he was like the smaller vessels which always follow in the wake of the larger ships, and as tenders to them.

De Saint-Aignan was the very man whom Madame needed in her state of mind at that moment; and as for him, he only looked for worthier ears than others he had found, to have an opportunity of recounting the event with all its details, and therefore he did not spare Madame a single word of the whole affair. When he had

finished, Madame said to him, "Confess, now, that it is all a charming invention."

"Invention, — no; a true story, — yes."

"Confess, whether invention or true story, that it was told to you as you have told it to me, but that you were not there."

"Upon my honor, Madame, I was there."

"And you think that these confessions may have made an impression upon the king?"

"Certainly, as those of Mademoiselle Tonnay-Charente did upon me," replied De Saint-Aignan. "Do not forget, Madame, that Mademoiselle de la Vallière compared the king to the sun; that was flattering enough."

"The king does not permit himself to be influenced by such flatteries."

"Madame, the king is just as much man as sun; and I saw that plainly enough just now when La Vallière fell into his arms."

"La Vallière fell into the king's arms!"

"Oh, it was the most graceful picture possible! Just imagine! La Vallière had fallen back fainting, and —"

"Well, what did you see? Tell me, — speak!"

"I saw, what ten other people saw at the same time, — I saw that when La Vallière fell into his arms, the king himself almost fainted."

Madame uttered a subdued cry, the only indication of her smothered anger. "Thank you," she said, laughing in a convulsive manner; "you relate stories delightfully, M. de Saint-Aignan;" and she hurried away, alone and almost suffocated by her feelings, towards the château.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

EVENING STROLLS.

Monsieur had taken leave of the princess in the best possible humor, and feeling much fatigued by the day's events had retired to his apartments, leaving every one to finish the night as he chose. When in his room, Monsieur began to dress for the night with a careful attention, which displayed itself from time to time in fits of satisfaction. While his attendants were engaged in dressing him, he sang the principal airs of the ballet which the violins had played, and to which the king had danced. He then summoned his tailors, inspected his costumes for the next day, and in token of his extreme satisfaction distributed various presents among them. When the Chevalier de Lorraine, who had seen the prince return to the château, also came in, Monsieur overwhelmed him with kindness. The former, after having saluted the prince, remained silent for a moment, like a sharp-shooter who deliberates before deciding in what direction he will renew his fire; then, seeming to make up his mind, he said, "Have you remarked a very singular circumstance, Monseigneur?"

"No; what is it?"

"The bad reception which his Majesty in appearance gave the Comte de Guiche."

"In appearance?"

"Yes, certainly, since in reality he has restored him to favor."

"I did not notice it," said the prince.

"What! did you not see that instead of ordering him to return to his exile, as would have been natural, he encouraged him in his strange opposition by permitting him to resume his place in the ballet?"

"And you think that the king was wrong, Chevalier?" asked Monsieur.

"Are not you of my opinion, Prince?"

"Not altogether so, my dear chevalier; and I think the king was quite right not to have flown into a rage against a poor fellow more foolish than evil-disposed."

"Really," said the chevalier, "so far as I am concerned, I confess that this magnanimity astonishes me in the highest degree."

"Why so?" inquired Philip.

"Because I should have thought that the king would have been more jealous," replied the chevalier, spitefully. During the last few minutes Monsieur had felt that there was something of an irritating nature concealed under his favorite's remarks; this last word, however, had ignited the powder.

"Jealous!" exclaimed the prince, — "jealous! What do you mean by that remark? Jealous of what, if you please, — or jealous of whom?"

The chevalier perceived that he had allowed one of those mischievous remarks to escape him to which he sometimes gave utterance. He endeavored, therefore, to recall it while it was still possible to do so. "Jealous of his authority," he said, with an assumed frankness; "of what else would you have the king be jealous?"

"Ah!" said Monseigneur, "that 's very proper."

"Did your royal Highness," continued the chevalier, "solicit dear De Guiche's pardon?"

"No, indeed," said Monsieur. "Guiche is a clever fel-

low, and full of courage; but as I do not approve of his conduct with Madame, I wish him neither harm nor good."

The chevalier had assumed a bitterness with regard to De Guiche, as he had attempted to do with the king; but he thought that he perceived that the time for indulgence and even for the utmost indifference had arrived, and that in order to throw some light on the question it might be necessary for him to put the lamp, as the saying is, under the husband's very nose. In this game one sometimes burns others, but often gets burned himself.

"Very well, very well," said the chevalier to himself, "I shall wait for De Wardes. He will do more in one day than I in a month; for I believe — God forgive me, or rather him — that he is still more jealous than I am. Then, again, it is not De Wardes even whom I require, so much as that some event should happen; and in the whole of this affair I see none. That De Guiche returned after he had been sent away is certainly serious enough, but all its seriousness disappears when I consider that De Guiche has returned at the very moment when Madame troubles herself no longer about him. Madame, in fact, is occupied with the king; that is clear. But besides that I cannot and do not want to meddle with the king, Madame cannot be much longer occupied with the king, if, as is asserted, the king has ceased to occupy himself about her. The gist of the whole matter is that we must remain perfectly quiet, and await the arrival of some new caprice, and let that decide the whole affair." The chevalier thereupon settled himself resignedly in the armchair in which Monsieur permitted him to seat himself in his presence; and having no more spiteful or malicious remarks to make, the chevalier's wit seemed to have deserted him. Most fortunately Monsieur was endowed

with great good-humor, as has been already stated, and he had enough for two, until the time arrived for dismissing his servants and gentlemen of the chamber, and he then passed into his sleeping apartment. As he withdrew, he desired the chevalier to present his compliments to Madame, and say that as the night was cool, and as he was afraid of the toothache, he would not venture out again into the park during the remainder of the evening.

The chevalier entered the princess's apartments at the very moment when she herself entered them. He acquitted himself faithfully of the commission which had been intrusted to him, and in the first place remarked the indifference and annoyance even with which Madame received her husband's communication, — a circumstance which appeared to him fraught with something quite fresh. If Madame had been about to leave her apartments with that strangeness of manner about her, he would have followed her; but Madame was returning to them. There was nothing to be done. Therefore he turned upon his heel like an unemployed heron; seemed to question earth, air, and water about it; shook his head, and walked away mechanically in the direction of the gardens. He had hardly gone a hundred paces when he met two young men, walking arm-in-arm, with their heads bent down, and idly kicking the small stones out of their path as they walked on, plunged in thought. It was De Guiche and Bragelonne, the sight of whom, as it always did, produced upon the Chevalier de Lorraine instinctively a feeling of great repugnance. He did not, however, the less on that account salute them with a very low bow, which they returned with interest. Then, observing that the park was becoming deserted, that the illuminations were beginning to burn out, and that the morning breeze

was springing up, he turned to the left and entered the château again by one of the smaller courtyards. The others turned aside to the right, and continued on their way towards the large park. As the chevalier was ascending the side staircase which led to the private entrance, he saw a woman, followed by another, make her appearance under the arcade which led from the small to the large courtyard. The two women walked so fast that the rustling of their silk dresses betrayed them in the darkness of the night. The style of their mantles, their graceful figures, a mysterious yet haughty carriage which distinguished them both, especially the one who walked first, struck the chevalier.

"I certainly know those two ladies," said he to himself, pausing upon the top step of the small staircase. Then, as with the instinct of a bloodhound he was about to follow them, one of his servants who had been running after him arrested his attention.

"Monsieur," he said, "the courier has arrived."

"Very well," said the chevalier, "there is time enough; to-morrow will do."

"There are some urgent letters which Monsieur the Chevalier would be glad to see, perhaps."

"Ah!" inquired the chevalier, "where from?"

"One from England, and the other from Calais; the latter arrived by express, and seems of great importance."

"From Calais! Who the deuce writes to me from Calais?"

"I think I can recognize the handwriting of your friend M. le Comte de Wardes."

"Oh!" cried the chevalier, forgetting his intention of acting the spy, "in that case I will come up at once." This he did, while the two unknown ladies disappeared

at the end of the court opposite to the one by which they had just entered.

We shall now follow them, and leave the chevalier undisturbed to his correspondence. When they had arrived at the grove of trees, the foremost of the two halted, somewhat out of breath, and cautiously raising her hood said, "Are we still far from the tree?"

"Yes, Madame, more than five hundred paces. But pray rest awhile; you will not be able to walk much longer at this pace."

"You are right," said the princess, — for it was she; and she leaned against a tree. "And now, Mademoiselle," she resumed, after having recovered her breath, "tell me the whole truth, and conceal nothing from me."

"Oh, Madame," said the young girl, in an agitated voice, "you are already angry with me."

"No, my dear Athenaïs; reassure yourself! I am in no way angry with you. After all, these things do not concern me personally. You are anxious about what you may have said under the oak, you are afraid of having offended the king; and I wish to tranquillize you by ascertaining myself if it were possible that you could have been overheard."

"Oh, yes, Madame; the king was so close to us."

"Still, you were not speaking so loud that some of your remarks may not have been lost."

"We thought that we were quite alone, Madame."

"There were three of you, you say?"

"Yes; La Vallière, Montalais, and myself."

"And you, individually, spoke in a light manner of the king?"

"I am afraid so. Should such be the case, your Highness will have the kindness to make my peace with his Majesty, will you not, Madame?"

"If there should be any occasion for it, I promise you to do so. However, as I have already told you, it will be better not to anticipate evil, and to be quite sure first that evil has been committed. The night is now very dark, and the darkness is still greater under those large trees. It is not likely that you were recognized by the king. To inform him of it, by being the first to speak, is to denounce yourself."

"Oh, Madame, Madame! if Mademoiselle de la Vallière were recognized, I must have been recognized also. Besides, M. de Saint-Aignan did not leave me a doubt on that subject."

"Did you, then, say anything very disrespectful of the king?"

"Not at all, Madame. It was one of the others who made some very flattering remarks about the king; and my remarks may have been much in contrast with hers."

"That Montalais is such a giddy girl," said Madame.

"Oh, it was not Montalais! Montalais said nothing; it was La Vallière."

Madame started as if she had not known it perfectly already. "No, no," she said; "the king cannot have heard. Besides, we will now try the experiment for which we came out. Show me the oak. Do you know where it is?" she continued.

"Alas, Madame, yes."

"And you can find it again?"

"I could find it with my eyes shut."

"That is very well, then. You will sit down on the bank where you were, where La Vallière was, and speak in the same tone and to the same effect as you did before. I will conceal myself in the thicket; and if I can hear you, I will tell you so."

"Yes, Madame."

"If, therefore, you really spoke sufficiently loud for the king to have heard you, in that case —"

Athenaïs seemed to await the conclusion of the phrase with some anxiety.

"In that case," said Madame, in a stifled voice, arising doubtless from her hurried progress, — "in that case, I forbid you —" And Madame again increased her pace. Suddenly, however, she stopped. "An idea occurs to me," she said.

"A good idea, no doubt, Madame," replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente.

"Montalais must be as much embarrassed as La Vallière and yourself."

"Less so; for she is less compromised, having said less."

"That does not matter; she will help you, I dare say, by deviating a little from the exact truth."

"Especially if she knows that your Highness is kind enough to interest yourself about me."

"Very well; I think I have discovered what we want, my dear."

"How delightful!"

"You will say that all three of you were perfectly well aware of the presence of the king behind that tree or behind that thicket, whichever it might have been; and that you knew M. de Saint-Aignan was there too."

"Yes, Madame."

"For you cannot disguise it from yourself, Athenaïs, that Saint-Aignan takes advantage of some very flattering remarks which you made about him."

ll, Madame, you see very well that one can be rd," cried Athenaïs, "since M. de Saint-Aignan rd us."

Madame bit her lips, for she had thoughtlessly committed herself. "Oh, you know Saint-Aignan's character very well," she said; "the favor the king shows him almost turns his brain, and he talks at random, — not only that, he very often invents. Besides, that is not the question; the fact remains, Did or did not the king overhear?"

"Oh, yes, Madame, he did hear," said Athenaïs, in despair.

"In that case do what I said: maintain boldly that all three of you knew, — mind, all three of you; for if there is a doubt about any one of you, there will be a doubt about all, — persist, I say, that you all three were aware of the presence of the king and of M. de Saint-Aignan, and that you wished to amuse yourselves at the expense of those who were listening."

"Oh, Madame, at the king's expense; we never dare say that!"

"It is a simple jest; an innocent deception readily permitted in young girls, whom men wish to take by surprise. In this manner everything is explained. What Montalais said of Malicorne, a mere jest; what you said of M. de Saint-Aignan, a mere jest too; and what La Vallière might have said of — "

"And which she would have given anything to have recalled."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Perfectly so."

"Very well; an additional reason, therefore. Say that the whole affair was a mere joke. M. de Malicorne will have no occasion to get out of temper; M. de Saint-Aignan will be completely put out of countenance, — he will be laughed at instead of you; and, lastly, the king will be punished for a curiosity which was unworthy of his rank.

Let people laugh a little at the king in this affair, and I do not think he will complain of it."

"Oh, Madame, you are indeed an angel of goodness and sense."

"It is to my own advantage."

"In what way?"

"Do you ask me how it is to my advantage to spare my maids of honor remarks, annoyances, and perhaps even calumnies? Alas! you well know, my dear, that the court has no indulgence for this sort of peccadilloes. But we have now been walking for some time; shall we be long before we reach it?"

"About fifty or sixty paces farther; turn to the left, Madame, if you please."

"And so you are sure of Montalais?" said Madame.

"Oh, certainly."

"Will she do what you ask her?"

"Everything. She will be delighted."

"As for La Vallière — " ventured the princess.

"Ah, there will be some difficulty with her, Madame; she would scorn to tell a falsehood."

"Yet when it is for her interest to do so — "

"I am afraid that that would not make the slightest difference in her ideas."

"Yes, yes," said Madame, "I have been already told that. She is one of those over-nice and affectedly particular persons, who place Heaven in the foreground to conceal themselves behind it. But if she refuse to tell a falsehood, — as she will expose herself to the jests of the whole court, as she will have annoyed the king by a confession as ridiculous as it was immodest, — Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière will think it but proper that I should send her back again to her pigeons in the country, in order that in Touraine yonder or in

Le Blaisois — I know not where it may be — she may at her ease study sentiment and pastoral simplicity together." These words were uttered with a vehemence and harshness which terrified Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; and the consequence was that so far as she was concerned, she promised to tell as many falsehoods as might be necessary. It was in this amiable frame of mind that Madame and her companion reached the neighborhood of the royal oak.

"Here we are," said Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente.

"We shall soon learn if one can overhear," replied Madame.

"Hush!" said the young girl, holding Madame back with a hurried gesture, entirely forgetful of etiquette. Madame stopped.

"You see that you can hear," said Athenaïs.

"How?"

"Listen!"

Madame held her breath; and in fact the following words, pronounced by a gentle and melancholy voice, floated towards them: "I tell you, Viscount, I tell you I love her madly; I tell you I love her to distraction."

Madame started at the voice, and beneath her hood a bright joyous smile illumined her features. It was she who now stayed her companion; and with a light footstep leading her some twenty paces back, that is to say, out of the reach of the voice, she said: "Remain there, my dear Athenaïs, and let no one surprise us. I think it may be you about whom they are conversing."

"Me, Madame?"

"Yes, you; or rather your adventure. I will go and listen; if we were both there, we should be discovered. Go and fetch Montalais, and then return and wait for me with her at the entrance of the forest." And then,

as Athenaïs hesitated, the princess again said "Go!" in a voice which did not admit of reply.

Athenaïs thereupon caught up her rustling skirts, and by a path which crossed the group of trees she regained the flower-garden. As for Madame, she concealed herself in the thicket, leaning her back against a gigantic chestnut-tree, one of the roots of which had been cut in such a manner as to form a seat, and waited there full of anxiety and apprehension. "Now," she said, "since one can hear from this place, let us listen to what M. de Bragelonne and that other madly-in-love fool, the Comte de Guiche, have to say about me."

CHAPTER XLIX.

IN WHICH MADAME ACQUIRES A PROOF THAT LISTENERS CAN HEAR WHAT IS SAID.

THERE was a moment's silence, as if all the mysterious sounds of night were hushed to listen, at the same time with Madame, to these youthful and passionate disclosures.

It was Raoul's turn to speak. He leaned indolently against the trunk of the great oak, and replied in his sweet and musical voice, "Alas, my dear De Guiche, it is a great misfortune!"

"Yes," cried the latter, "great indeed!"

"You do not understand me, De Guiche. I say that it is a great misfortune for you, — not that of loving, but that of not knowing how to conceal your love."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Yes, you do not perceive one thing; namely, that it is no longer to the only friend you have, — in other words, to a man who would rather die than betray you: you do not perceive, I say, that it is no longer to your only friend that you confide your passion, but you betray it to the first-comer."

"To the first-comer!" exclaimed De Guiche; "are you mad, Bragelonne, to say such a thing to me?"

"The fact is so, however."

"Impossible! How, in what manner, could I have become indiscreet to such an extent?"

"I mean, my friend, that your eyes, your manner, your sighs, speak, in spite of yourself; that every unbridled

feeling leads and hurries a man beyond his own control. In such a case he ceases to be master of himself; he is a prey to a mad passion, which makes him confide his grief to the trees, to his horses, or to the air, from the very moment when he has no longer any intelligent being within reach of his voice. Besides, my poor friend, remember this: it very rarely happens that there is not always some one present to hear, especially those very things which ought not to be heard." De Guiche uttered a deep sigh. "Nay," continued Bragelonne, "you distress me; since your return here you have a hundred times and in a hundred different ways confessed your love for her; and even, had you not said anything, your return would alone have been a terrible indiscretion. I persist, then, in drawing this conclusion, — that if you do not place a greater watch over yourself than you have hitherto done, one day or another something will happen which will cause an explosion. Who will save you then? Answer me! Who will save her? — for, innocent as she will be of your affection, your affection will be an accusation against her in the hands of her enemies."

"Alas!" murmured De Guiche; and a deep sigh accompanied the exclamation.

"That is not answering me, De Guiche."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, what reply have you to make?"

"This, my friend, — that when that day arrives, I shall not be less a living being than I feel myself to be now."

"I do not understand you."

"So many vicissitudes have worn me out. At present, I am no more a thinking, acting being; at present, the most worthless of men is better than I am; therefore my remaining strength is now exhausted, my latest-formed resolutions have vanished, and I abandon myself to my

fate. When a man is out campaigning, as we have been together, and he sets off alone to reconnoitre, it sometimes happens that he meets with a party of five or six foragers, and although alone he defends himself; afterwards, five or six others arrive unexpectedly, — his anger is aroused and he persists; but if six, eight, or ten others come up, he either sets spurs to his horse, if he is still on horseback, or lets himself be slain to save an ignominious flight. Such, indeed, is my own case: first I had to struggle against myself; afterwards, against Buckingham; now, since the king is in the field, I will not contend against the king, nor even, I wish you to understand, should the king withdraw, against the nature of that woman. Still, I do not deceive myself! Having committed myself to the thraldom of that love, I will lose my life in it."

"It is not she whom you ought to reproach," replied Raoul; "it is yourself."

"Why so?"

"You know the princess's character, — somewhat giddy, easily captivated by novelty, susceptible to flattery, whether it come from a blind person or a child, — and yet you allow your passion for her to eat your very life away. Look at her; love her, if you will, — for no one whose heart is not engaged elsewhere can see her without loving her, — yet while you love her, respect, in the first place, her husband's rank, then himself, and lastly your own safety."

"Thanks, Raoul."

"For what?"

"Because, seeing how much I suffer for this woman, you endeavor to console me, — because you tell me all the good of her you think, and perhaps even that which you do not think."

"Oh," said Raoul, "there you are wrong, De Guiche!

What I think I do not always say; but in that case I say nothing. But when I speak, I know not either how to feign or to deceive; and whoever listens to me may believe me."

During this conversation Madame, her head stretched forward, with eager ear and dilated gaze endeavoring to penetrate the obscurity, thirstily drank in the faintest sound of their voices.

"Oh, I know her better than you do, then!" exclaimed De Guiche. "She is not giddy, but frivolous; she is not attracted by novelty, — she is utterly oblivious, and is without faith; she is not simply susceptible to flattery, — she is a practised and cruel coquette, a thorough coquette. Yes, yes, I am sure of it. Believe me, Bragelonne, I am suffering all the torments of hell. Brave, passionately fond of danger, I meet a danger greater than my strength and my courage; but, believe me, Raoul, I reserve for myself a victory which shall cost her floods of tears."

Raoul looked at his friend; and as the latter, almost breathless with emotion, threw back his head against the trunk of the oak, "A victory," he asked, "of what kind?"

"Of what kind, you ask?"

"Yes."

"One day I will accost her, and will address her thus: 'I was young, I was madly in love; I possessed, however, sufficient respect to throw myself at your feet, and to prostrate myself with my forehead buried in the dust, if your looks had not raised me to your hand. I fancied I understood your looks; I arose, and then, without having done anything towards you except love you yet more devotedly, if that were possible, you, a woman without heart, faith, or love, in very wantonness of disposition,

dashed me down again from mere caprice. You are unworthy, princess of the royal blood though you may be, of the love of an honest man. I offer my life as a sacrifice for having loved you too tenderly, and I die hating you.'"

"Oh!" cried Raoul, terrified at the accents of profound sincerity which the young man's words betrayed, "I was right in saying you were mad, De Guiche."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed De Guiche, following out his own idea; "since there are no wars here now, I will flee yonder to the north, seek service in the Empire, where some Hungarian or Croat or Turk will kindly put me out of my misery at once."

De Guiche did not finish; or rather, as he finished, a sound made him start, and at the same moment made Raoul leap to his feet. As for De Guiche, buried in his own thoughts, he remained seated, with his head tightly pressed between his hands. The bushes were pushed aside, and a woman, pale and much agitated, appeared before the two young men. With one hand she held back the branches which would have struck her face, and with the other she raised the hood of the mantle which covered her shoulders. By her clear and lustrous glance, by her lofty carriage, by her haughty attitude, and still more than all by the throbbing of his own heart, De Guiche recognized Madame, and uttering a loud cry he removed his hands from his temples, and covered his eyes with them. Raoul, trembling and out of countenance, fumbled with his hat, and merely muttered a few formal words of respect.

"M. de Bragelonne," said the princess, "have the goodness, I beg, to see if my attendants are not somewhere yonder, either in the walks or in the groves; and you, Monsieur the Count, remain here, — I am tired, and you will perhaps give me your arm."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at the feet of the unhappy young man, he would have been less terrified than by her cold and severe tone. However, as he himself had just said, he was brave; and as in the depths of his own heart he had just decisively made up his mind, De Guiche arose, and observing Bragelonne's hesitation turned towards him a glance full of resignation and of grateful acknowledgment. Instead of immediately answering Madame, he even advanced a step towards the viscount, and holding out towards him the hand which the princess had just desired him to give her, pressed the loyal hand of his friend in his own with a sigh, in which he seemed to give to friendship all the life that was left in the depths of his heart.

Madame, who in her pride had never known what it was to wait, now waited until this mute colloquy was ended. Her royal hand remained suspended in the air; and when Raoul had left, it sank without anger, but not without emotion, into that of De Guiche. They were alone in the depths of the dark and silent forest, and nothing could be heard but Raoul's hastily retreating footsteps along the obscure paths. Over their heads was extended the thick and fragrant vault of branches, through the occasional openings of which the stars could be seen glittering. Madame softly drew De Guiche about a hundred paces away from that indiscreet tree which had heard and had allowed so many things to be heard during that evening; and leading him to a neighboring glade, so that they could see a certain distance around them, she said in a trembling voice, "I have brought you here, because yonder, where we were, everything can be overheard."

"Everything can be overheard, did you say, Madame?" replied the young man, mechanically.

"Yes."

"Which means — " murmured De Guiche.

"Which means that I have heard every syllable you have said."

"Oh, Heaven! this only was wanting to destroy me," stammered De Guiche; and he hung down his head, like an exhausted swimmer beneath the wave which engulfs him.

"And so," Madame began, "you judge me as you have said?"

De Guiche grew pale, turned his head aside, and was silent; he felt almost on the point of fainting.

"I do not complain," continued the princess, in a tone of voice full of gentleness. "I prefer a frankness which wounds me, to flattery which would deceive me. And so, according to your opinion, M. de Guiche, I am a coquette and a worthless creature?"

"Worthless!" cried the young man, — "you worthless! Oh, most certainly I did not say, I could not have said, that that which was the most precious object in life for me could be worthless! No, no; I did not say that."

"A woman who sees a man perish, consumed by the fire she has kindled, and who does not allay that fire, is, in my opinion, a worthless woman."

"What can it matter to you what I said?" returned the count. "What am I, compared to you, and why should you even trouble yourself to know whether I exist or not?"

"M. de Guiche, both you and I are human beings; and knowing you as I do, I do not wish you to risk your life. With you I will change my conduct and character. I will be, not frank, — for I am always so, — but truthful. I implore you, therefore, Monsieur the Count, to love me no more, and to forget entirely that I have ever addressed a word or a glance to you."

De Guiche turned, bending a look full of passionate devotion upon her. "You," he said, — "you excuse yourself! you implore me!"

"Certainly; since I have done the evil, I ought to repair the evil I have done. And so, Monsieur the Count, this is the agreement; you will forgive my frivolity and my coquetry — nay, do not interrupt me; I will forgive you for having said I was frivolous and a coquette, or something worse perhaps; and you will renounce your idea of dying, and will preserve for your family, for the king, and for our sex a cavalier whom every one esteems, and whom many hold dear." Madame pronounced this last word with such an accent of frankness and even of tenderness that the poor young man's heart seemed ready to burst.

"Oh, Madame, Madame!" he stammered.

"Nay, listen further," she continued. "When you shall have renounced all thought of me forever, — from necessity in the first place, and afterwards because you will yield to my entreaty, — then you will judge me more favorably, and I am convinced that you will replace this love (forgive the folly of the expression) by a sincere friendship, which you will be ready to offer me, and which I assure you shall be cordially accepted."

De Guiche, his forehead bedewed with perspiration, a feeling of death in his heart, and a trembling agitation through his whole frame, bit his lip, stamped his foot on the ground, and, in a word, devoured the bitterness of his grief. "Madame," he said, "what you offer is impossible, and I cannot accept such conditions."

"What!" said Madame; "do you refuse my friendship?"

"No, no! I need not your friendship, Madame; I prefer to die from love than to live for friendship."

"Monsieur the Count!"

"Oh, Madame!" cried De Guiche, "I have come to that supreme moment in which no other consideration and no other duty exists than the consideration and duty of a man of honor towards the woman he worships. Drive me away, curse me, denounce me, — you will be perfectly right. I have uttered complaints against you, but I complained so bitterly because I love you; I have said that I would die, and die I shall. If I lived, you would forget me; but dead, you would never forget me, I am sure."

And meanwhile Madame, who was standing buried in thought, and as agitated as the young man himself, turned aside her head as he but a minute before had turned aside his. Then, after a moment's pause, she said, "And you love me then, very much?"

"Madly, — madly enough to die from it, whether you drive me from you or whether you listen to me still."

"It is, then, a hopeless case," she said in a playful manner, — "a case which must be treated with soothing applications. Give me your hand; it is as cold as ice."

De Guiche knelt down and pressed to his lips not one, but both, of Madame's burning hands.

"Love me, then," said the princess, "since it cannot be otherwise;" and almost imperceptibly she pressed his fingers, raising him thus, partly in the manner of a queen and partly as a fond and affectionate woman would have done. De Guiche trembled from head to foot; and Madame, who felt how passion coursed through every fibre of his being, knew that he indeed loved truly. "Give me your arm, Count," she said, "and let us return."

"Ah, Madame!" said the count, bewildered and with

unsteady step, a fiery mist before his eyes, "you have discovered a third way of killing me."

"But happily it is the longest, is it not?" Madame replied, as she led him towards the grove of trees she had left.

CHAPTER L.

ARAMIS'S CORRESPONDENCE.

WHILE De Guiche's affairs, which had been thus suddenly set to rights without his having been able to guess the cause of their improvement, assumed that unexpected change which we have seen them take, Raoul, in obedience to Madame's request, had withdrawn in order not to interrupt an explanation the results of which he was far from guessing, and he had joined the ladies of honor who were walking about in the flower-gardens.

During this time the Chevalier de Lorraine, who had returned to his own room, read De Wardes's letter with surprise; for it informed him, by the hand of his valet, of the sword-thrust received at Calais and of all the details of the adventure, and invited him to communicate to De Guiche and to Monsieur whatever there might be in the affair likely to be particularly disagreeable to either of them. De Wardes particularly endeavored to prove to the chevalier the violence of Madame's affection for Buckingham, and he finished his letter by declaring that he thought this feeling was returned. The chevalier shrugged his shoulders on reading the latter paragraph; and in fact De Wardes was very much behindhand, as may have been seen. De Wardes was still only at Buckingham's affair. The chevalier threw the letter over his shoulder upon an adjoining table, and said in a disdainful tone: "It is really incredible! That poor De Wardes is not deficient in intelligence; but

truly he does appear so in this matter, so easy is it to grow rusty in the country. The deuce take the simpleton, who ought to have written to me about matters of importance, and who writes such silly stuff as that! If it had n't been for that miserable letter, which has no sense at all in it, I should have detected in the grove yonder a charming little intrigue, which would have compromised a woman, would have perhaps been as good as a sword-thrust for a man, and have diverted Monsieur for some days to come."

He looked at his watch. "It is now too late," he said. "One o'clock in the morning; every one must have returned to the king's apartments, where the night is to be finished. Well, the scent is lost; and unless some extraordinary chance —" And thus saying, as if to appeal to his good star, the chevalier, much out of temper, approached the window, which looked out upon a somewhat solitary part of the garden. Immediately, and as if some evil genius had been at his orders, he perceived returning towards the château, accompanied by a man, a silk mantle of a dark color, and recognized the figure which had attracted his attention half an hour previously.

"Eh! *mon Dieu!*" he thought, clapping his hands together; "here is my mystery!" and he started precipitately down the staircase, hoping to reach the courtyard in time to recognize the woman in the mantle and her companion. But as he arrived at the door in the little court, he nearly ran against Madame, whose radiant face seemed full of charming revelations beneath the mantle which protected without concealing her. Unfortunately, Madame was alone. The chevalier knew that since he had seen her not five minutes before with a gentleman, the gentleman in question could not

be far off. Consequently he hardly took time to salute the princess as he drew up to allow her to pass; then, when she had advanced a few steps with the rapidity of a woman who fears recognition, and when the chevalier perceived that she was too much occupied with her own thoughts to trouble herself about him, he darted into the garden, looked hastily about on every side, and embraced within his glance as much of the horizon as he possibly could. He was just in time. The gentleman who had accompanied Madame was still in sight; only he was rapidly hurrying towards one of the wings of the château, behind which he was just on the point of disappearing. There was not a minute to be lost. The chevalier darted in pursuit of him, prepared to slacken his pace as he approached the unknown; but in spite of the diligence he used, the unknown had disappeared behind the flight of steps before he reached the spot.

It was evident, however, that as he whom the chevalier pursued was walking quietly, in a very pensive manner, with his head bent down either beneath the weight of grief or of happiness, when once the angle was passed, unless indeed he were to enter by some door or other, the chevalier could not fail to overtake him. And this certainly would have happened if at the very moment when he turned the angle the chevalier had not run against two persons, who were themselves turning it in the opposite direction. The chevalier was quite ready to seek a quarrel with these two troublesome intruders, when raising his head he recognized Monsieur the Superintendent.

Fouquet was accompanied by a person whom the chevalier now saw for the first time. This stranger was his Grace the Bishop of Vannes. Checked by the important character of the individual, and obliged by propriety to

make his own excuses when he expected to receive them, the chevalier stepped back a pace or two. And as M. Fouquet possessed, if not the friendship, at least the respect of every one; as the king himself, although he was rather his enemy than his friend, treated M. Fouquet as a man of great consideration, — the chevalier did what the king would have done; namely, he bowed to M. Fouquet, who returned his salutation with kindly politeness, perceiving that the gentleman had run against him by mistake and without any intention of being rude. Then almost immediately afterwards, having recognized the Chevalier de Lorraine, he made a few civil remarks, to which the chevalier was obliged to reply. Brief as the conversation was, the Chevalier de Lorraine saw with the most unfeigned displeasure the figure of his unknown becoming less and less in the distance, and fast disappearing in the darkness. The chevalier resigned himself, and once resigned, gave his entire attention to M. Fouquet. "You arrive late, Monsieur," he said. "Your absence has occasioned great surprise, and I heard Monsieur express himself as much astonished that having been invited by the king, you had not come."

"It was impossible for me to do so, Monsieur; but I came as soon as I was free."

"Is Paris quiet?"

"Perfectly so. Paris has received the last tax very well."

"Ah, I understand! You wished to assure yourself of this good feeling before you came to participate in our festivities."

"I have arrived, however, somewhat late to enjoy them. I will ask you therefore, Monsieur, to inform me if the king is within the château, if I shall be able to see him to-night, or if I am to wait until to-morrow."

"We lost sight of the king about half an hour ago," said the chevalier.

"Perhaps he is in Madame's apartments," inquired Fouquet.

"Not in Madame's apartments, I should think, for I have just met Madame as she was entering by the small staircase; and unless the gentleman whom you just now passed was the king himself — " and the chevalier paused, hoping that in this manner he might learn who it was he had been pursuing.

But Fouquet, whether he had or had not recognized De Guiche, simply replied, "No, Monsieur, it was not he."

The chevalier, disappointed, saluted them; but as he did so, casting a parting glance around him, and perceiving M. Colbert in the centre of a group, he said to the superintendent, "Stay, Monsieur! there is some one under the trees yonder, who will be able to inform you better than myself."

"Who?" asked Fouquet, whose near-sightedness prevented his seeing through the darkness.

"M. Colbert," returned the chevalier.

"Ah, indeed! That person, then, who is speaking yonder to those men with torches in their hands is M. Colbert?"

"M. Colbert himself. He is giving his orders for to-morrow to the workmen who are arranging the lamps for the illuminations."

"Thank you, Monsieur," said Fouquet, with an inclination of the head which indicated that he had obtained all the information he wished. The chevalier, on his side, having on the contrary learned nothing at all, withdrew with a profound salutation.

He had scarcely left, when Fouquet, knitting his brows, fell into a deep reverie. Aramis looked at him for a

moment with a mingled feeling of compassion and sadness. "What!" he said to him; "that man's name alone seems to affect you. Is it possible that, full of triumph and delight as you were just now, the sight merely of that apparition is capable of dispiriting you? Tell me, Monsieur, have you faith in your good star?"

"No," replied Fouquet, dejectedly.

"Why not?"

"Because I am too full of happiness at this present moment," he replied in a trembling voice. "Ah, my dear D'Herblay, you, who are so learned, will remember the history of a certain tyrant of Samos. What can I throw into the sea to avert approaching evil? Yes, I repeat it once more, my friend: I am too happy, — so happy that I wish for nothing beyond what I have. I have risen so high, — you know my motto, *Quo non ascendam*, — I have risen so high that nothing is left to me but to descend. I cannot believe in the progress of a success which is already more than human."

Aramis smiled as he fixed his kind and penetrating glance upon Fouquet. "If I were aware of the cause of your happiness," he said, "I should probably dread your disgrace; but you regard me in the light of a true friend, — I mean, you turn to me in misfortune, nothing more. Even that is an immense and precious boon, I know; but the truth is, I have a just right to beg you to confide in me, from time to time, any fortunate circumstances which may befall you, and in which I should rejoice, you know, more than if they had befallen myself."

"My dear prelate," said Fouquet, laughing, "my secrets are of too profane a character to confide them to a bishop, however great a worldling he may be."

"Bah! in confession?"

"Oh, I should blush too much if you were my confessor!" and Fouquet began to sigh. Aramis again looked at him without any other betrayal of his thoughts than a quiet smile.

"Well," he said, "discretion is a great virtue."

"Silence!" said Fouquet; "that venomous beast has recognized me, and is coming this way."

"Colbert?"

"Yes. Leave me, my dear D'Herblay; I do not wish that dirty pedant to see you with me, or he will take an aversion to you."

Aramis pressed his hand, saying, "What need have I of his friendship, while you are here?"

"Yes, but I may not be always here," replied Fouquet, dejectedly.

"On that day, then, if that day should ever come," said Aramis, tranquilly, "we will think over a means of dispensing with M. Colbert's friendship, or of braving his dislike. But tell me, my dear Fouquet, instead of conversing with this dirty pedant, as you did him the honor to style him, — a conversation the utility of which I do not perceive, — why do you not pay a visit, if not to the king, at least to Madame?"

"To Madame!" said the superintendent, his mind occupied by his fond reminiscences. "Yes, certainly, to Madame."

"You remember," continued Aramis, "that we have been told that Madame stands high in favor during the last two or three days. It enters into your policy, I think, and forms part of our plans, that you should assiduously devote yourself to his Majesty's friends. It is a means of counteracting the growing influence of M. Colbert. Present yourself, therefore, as soon as possible to Madame, and treat this ally with consideration."

"But," said Fouquet, "are you quite sure that it is really upon her that the king has his eyes fixed at the present moment?"

"If the needle has turned, it must be since the morning. You know I have my police."

"Very well. I will go there at once; and at all events I shall have a means of introduction, in the shape of a magnificent pair of antique cameos set round with diamonds."

"I have seen them, and nothing could be more costly and regal."

At this moment they were interrupted by a servant followed by a courier. "For Monsieur the Superintendent," said the courier, aloud, presenting a letter to Fouquet.

"For his Grace the Bishop of Vannes," said the lackey, in a low tone, handing Aramis a letter. And as the lackey carried a torch, he placed himself between the superintendent and the bishop, so that both of them could read at the same time. As Fouquet looked at the fine and delicate writing on the envelope, he started with delight; they who love or who are beloved will understand his anxiety in the first place, and his happiness in the next. He hastily tore open the letter, which contained only these words, —

"It is but an hour since I left you; it is an age since I told you that I love you."

And that was all. Madame de Bellière had, in fact, left Fouquet about an hour previously, after having passed two days with him; and apprehensive lest remembrance of her might be banished for too long a period from the heart she missed, she despatched a courier to him as the bearer of this important communication. Fouquet kissed

the letter, and rewarded the bearer with a handful of gold.

As for Aramis, he on his side was engaged in reading, but with more coolness and deliberation, the following note: —

"The king has this evening been struck with a strange fancy. A woman loves him; he learned it accidentally as he was listening to the conversation of this young girl with her companions, and his Majesty has entirely abandoned himself to this new caprice. The girl's name is Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and her beauty is passable enough to warrant this caprice becoming a strong attachment. Beware of Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

There was not a word about Madame. Aramis slowly folded the note and put it in his pocket. Fouquet was still engaged in inhaling the perfume of his epistle.

"Monseigneur," said Aramis, touching Fouquet's arm.

"Yes; what is it?" he asked.

"An idea has just occurred to me. Are you acquainted with a young girl by the name of La Vallière?"

"Not at all."

"Reflect a little."

"Ah, yes! I believe so, — one of Madame's maids of honor."

"That must be the one."

"Well, what then?"

"Well, Monseigneur, it is to that young girl you must pay your visit this evening."

"Bah! why so?"

"Nay, more than that, it is to that young girl you must present your cameos."

"Nonsense!"

"You know, Monseigneur, that my advice is not to be regarded lightly."

"Yet this unforeseen —"

"That is my affair. Pay your court in due form to little La Vallière, Monseigneur. I will be your guarantee with Madame de Bellière that your devotion is altogether politic."

"What do you mean, my friend?" exclaimed Fouquet, quickly; "and whose name have you just pronounced?"

"A name which ought to convince you, Monsieur the Superintendent, that as I am so well informed about yourself, I may possibly be as well informed about others. Pay your court, therefore, to La Vallière."

"I will pay my court to whomsoever you like," replied Fouquet, his heart filled with happiness.

"Come, come! descend again to the earth, traveller of the seventh heaven!" said Aramis; "here is M. de Colbert. He has been recruiting while we were reading; see how he is surrounded, praised, congratulated; he is decidedly becoming powerful."

In fact, Colbert was advancing, escorted by all the courtiers who remained in the gardens, every one of whom was so complimenting him upon the arrangements of the *fête* as to puff him up so that he could hardly contain himself.

"If La Fontaine were here," said Fouquet, smiling, "what an admirable opportunity for him to recite his fable of 'The Frog that wished to make itself as big as the Ox'!"

Colbert came up in the centre of a circle blazing with light. Fouquet awaited his approach unmoved, and with a slightly mocking smile. Colbert smiled too; he had been observing his enemy during the last quarter of an hour, and had been approaching him gradually. Colbert's smile was a presage of hostility.

"Oh!" said Aramis, in a low tone, to the superin-

tendent; "the scoundrel is going to ask you again for a few more millions to pay for his fireworks and his colored lamps."

Colbert was the first to make his salute, and with an air which he endeavored to render respectful. Fouquet hardly moved his head.

"Well, Monseigneur," asked Colbert, "what do your eyes say? Have we shown good taste?"

"Perfect taste," replied Fouquet, without permitting the slightest tone of raillery to be remarked in his words.

"Oh," said Colbert, maliciously, "you are treating us with indulgence! Some of us servants of the king are poor; and Fontainebleau is in no way to be compared as a residence with Vaux."

"Quite true," replied Fouquet, coolly, who domineered over all the participants in this scene.

"But what can we do, Monseigneur?" continued Colbert; "we have done our best according to our slender resources."

Fouquet made a gesture of assent.

"But," pursued Colbert, "it would be only a proper display of your magnificence, Monseigneur, if you were to offer to his Majesty a *fête* in your wonderful gardens, — in those gardens which have cost you sixty millions."

"Seventy-two," said Fouquet.

"An additional reason," returned Colbert; "it would indeed be truly magnificent."

"But do you suppose, Monsieur," said Fouquet, "that his Majesty would deign to accept my invitation?"

"I have no doubt whatever of it," cried Colbert, hastily; "I will guarantee that he does."

"You are exceedingly kind," said Fouquet. "I may depend on it, then?"

"Yes, Monseigneur; yes, certainly."

"Then I will consider it," said Fouquet.

"Accept, accept!" whispered Aramis, eagerly.

"You will consider it?" repeated Colbert.

"Yes," replied Fouquet, "in order to know what day I shall submit my invitation to the king."

"Oh, this very evening, Monseigneur, this very evening!"

"Agreed," said the superintendent. "Messieurs, I should wish to extend to you my invitations; but you know that wherever the king goes he is in his own palace, — it is by his Majesty, therefore, that you must be invited."

A murmur of delight immediately arose. Fouquet bowed and left.

"Proud and haughty man," said Colbert, "you accept, and you know it will cost you ten millions."

"You have ruined me," said Fouquet, in a low tone to Aramis.

"I have saved you," replied the latter; while Fouquet ascended the flight of steps and inquired whether the king were still visible.

CHAPTER LI.

THE ORDERLY CLERK.

The king, anxious to be again quite alone, in order to reflect well upon what was passing in his heart, had withdrawn to his own apartments, where M. de Saint-Aignan had, after his conversation with Madame, gone to meet him. This conversation has already been related. The favorite, vain of his twofold importance, feeling that he had become during the last two hours the confidant of the king, became less reverential, and began to treat the affairs of the court in a somewhat indifferent manner; from the position in which he had placed himself, or rather where chance had placed him, he saw nothing but love and garlands of flowers around him. The king's love for Madame, that of Madame for the king, that of De Guiche for Madame, that of La Vallière for the king, that of Malicorne for Montalais, that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente for him, De Saint-Aignan,—was not all this, truly, more than enough to turn the head of any courtier? Besides, De Saint-Aignan was the model of all courtiers, past, present, and future; and, moreover, De Saint-Aignan showed himself such an excellent narrator, and was so discerningly appreciative, that the king listened to him with an appearance of great interest, particularly when he described the excited manner with which Madame had sought for him to converse about the affair of Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Although the king no longer experienced for Madame Henrietta any remains of

the passion he had once felt for her, there was, in this eagerness of Madame to procure information about him, a gratification for his vanity from which he could not free himself. He experienced this gratification, then, but nothing more; and his heart was not for a single moment alarmed at what Madame might or might not think of this whole adventure.

When, however, De Saint-Aignan had finished, the king, while preparing to retire to rest, asked, "Now, Saint-Aignan, you know what Mademoiselle de la Vallière is, do you not?"

"Not only what she is, but what she will be."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that she is everything that a woman can wish to be,—that is to say, beloved by your Majesty; I mean that she will be everything your Majesty may wish her to be."

"That is not what I am asking. I do not wish to know what she is to-day, or what she will be to-morrow,—as you have remarked, that is my affair,—but what she was yesterday. Repeat to me what others say of her."

"They say that she is chaste."

"Oh," said the king, smiling, "that is but report!"

"But rare enough at court, Sire, to believe it when it is spread."

"Perhaps you are right, my friend. Is she well-born?"

"Excellently so; the daughter of the Marquis de la Vallière, and step-daughter of that good M. de Saint-Remy."

"Ah, yes, my aunt's major-domo! I remember that; and I remember now that I saw her as I passed through Blois. She was presented to the queens. I have even to reproach myself that I did not on that occasion pay her all the attention she deserved."

"Oh, Sire, I trust that your Majesty will repair the time you have lost!"

"And the report, you tell me, is that Mademoiselle de la Vallière never had a lover."

"In any case, I do not think your Majesty would be much alarmed at any rivalry."

"Yet, stay!" exclaimed the king, all at once, in a very serious tone of voice.

"Your Majesty?"

"I remember."

"Ah!"

"If she has no lover, she has at least a betrothed."

"A betrothed!"

"What! Count, do you not know that?"

"No."

"You, — the man who knows all the news?"

"Your Majesty will excuse me. Your Majesty knows this betrothed, then?"

"Assuredly! His father came to ask me to sign the marriage contract; it is —" The king was about to pronounce the Vicomte de Bragelonne's name, when he stopped and knitted his brows.

"It is —" repeated De Saint-Aignan, inquiringly.

"I don't remember now," replied Louis XIV., endeavoring to conceal an annoyance which he had some trouble to disguise.

"Can I put your Majesty in the way?" inquired the Comte de Saint-Aignan.

"No; for I myself no longer know to whom I intended to refer. Indeed, I only remember very indistinctly that one of the maids of honor was to marry — the name, however, has escaped me."

"Was it Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente he was going to marry?" inquired De Saint-Aignan.

"Very likely," said the king.

"In that case the intended was M. de Montespan; but Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente did not speak of it, it seemed to me, in such a manner as would frighten away suitors."

"At all events," said the king, "I know nothing, or almost nothing, about Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Saint-Aignan, I rely upon you to procure me some information about her."

"Yes, Sire; and when shall I have the honor of seeing your Majesty again, to give you the information?"

"Whenever you shall have procured it."

"I shall obtain it speedily if the information will come as quickly as my wish to see your Majesty again."

"Well said! By the by, has Madame displayed any ill-feeling against this poor girl?"

"None, Sire."

"Madame did not get angry, then?"

"I do not know; I only know that she laughed continually."

"Very well; but I think I hear voices in the anterooms, — no doubt a courier has just arrived. Inquire, Saint-Aignan."

The count ran to the door and exchanged a few words with the usher; he returned to the king, saying, "Sire, it is M. Fouquet, who has this moment arrived by your Majesty's orders, he says. He presented himself, but because of the advanced hour he does not press for an audience this evening, and is satisfied to have his presence here formally announced."

"M. Fouquet! I wrote to him at three o'clock, inviting him to be at Fontainebleau to-morrow morning, and he arrives at Fontainebleau at eleven o'clock. This is, indeed, zeal!" exclaimed the king, delighted to see him-

self so promptly obeyed. "On the contrary, M. Fouquet shall have his audience. I summoned him, and will receive him. Let him be introduced. As for you, Count, pursue your inquiries, and be here to-morrow."

The king placed his finger on his lips; and De Saint-Aignan, his heart overflowing with delight, hastily withdrew, giving the order to the usher to introduce M. Fouquet, who thereupon entered the king's apartment. Louis XIV. rose to receive him.

"Good-evening, M. Fouquet," he said, smiling graciously. "I congratulate you on your punctuality; and yet my message must have reached you late?"

"At nine in the evening, Sire."

"You have been working very hard lately, M. Fouquet, for I have been informed that you have not left your office at St. Mandé during the last three or four days."

"I have, in fact, Sire, kept myself shut up for the past three days," replied Fouquet, bowing.

"Do you know, M. Fouquet, that I have a great many things to say to you?" continued the king, with his most gracious air.

"Your Majesty overwhelms me; and since you are so graciously disposed towards me, will your Majesty permit me to remind you of the promise your Majesty made me to grant an audience?"

"Ah, yes; some church dignitary, who thinks he has to thank me for something, is it not?"

"Precisely so, Sire. The hour is perhaps badly chosen. But the time of the companion whom I have brought with me is valuable; and as Fontainebleau is on the way to his diocese —"

"Who is it, then?"

"The last bishop of Vannes, whom your Majesty by my recommendation condescended to invest three months since."

"That is very possible," said the king, who had signed the appointment without reading; "and is he here?"

"Yes, Sire. Vannes is an important diocese. The flock belonging to this pastor need his religious consolation; they are savages, whom it is necessary to polish at the same time that he instructs them, and M. d'Herblay is unequalled in missions of that kind."

"M. d'Herblay!" said the king, musingly, as if that name, heard long since, was not however unknown to him.

"Oh!" said Fouquet, promptly, "your Majesty is not acquainted with the obscure name of one of your most faithful and most valuable servants?"

"No, I confess I am not. And so he wishes to set off again?"

"He has this very day received letters which will perhaps necessitate his departure; so that, before setting off for that unknown region called Bretagne, he is desirous of paying his respects to your Majesty."

"Is he waiting?"

"He is here, Sire."

"Let him enter."

Fouquet made a sign to the usher in attendance, who was waiting behind the tapestry. The door opened, and Aramis entered. The king allowed him to finish the compliments which he addressed to him, and fixed a long look upon a countenance which no one could forget, after having once beheld it.

"Vannes!" he said; "you are Bishop of Vannes, Monsieur?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Vannes is in Bretagne, I think?"

Aramis bowed.

"Near the sea?"

Aramis again bowed.

"A few leagues from Belle-Isle, is it not?"

"Yes, Sire," replied Aramis; "six leagues, I believe."

"Six leagues; a mere step, then," said Louis XIV.

"Not for us poor Bretons, Sire," replied Aramis. "Six leagues, on the contrary, is a great distance if it be six leagues on land, and an immense distance if it be leagues on the sea. Now, I have had the honor to mention to your Majesty that there are six leagues of sea from the river to Belle-Isle."

"It is said that M. Fouquet has a very beautiful house there?" inquired the king.

"Yes, it is said so," said Aramis, looking quietly at Fouquet.

"What do you mean by 'it is said so'?" exclaimed the king.

"He has, Sire."

"Really, M. Fouquet, I must confess that one circumstance surprises me."

"What may that be?"

"Why, that you should have at the head of your parishes a man like M. d'Herblay, and yet should not have shown him Belle-Isle?"

"Oh, Sire," replied the bishop, without giving Fouquet time to answer, "we poor Breton prelates seldom leave our residences."

"M. de Vannes," said the king, "I will punish M. Fouquet for his indifference."

"In what way, Sire?"

"I will change your bishopric."

Fouquet bit his lips, but Aramis only smiled.

"What income does Vannes bring you in?" continued the king.

"Six thousand livres, Sire," said Aramis.

"So trifling an amount as that! But you possess other property, M. de Vannes?"

"I have nothing else, Sire; only, M. Fouquet pays me twelve hundred livres a year for his churchwarden's pew."

"Well, well, M. d'Herblay, I promise you something better than that."

"Sire —"

"I will not forget you."

Aramis bowed; and the king also bowed to him in a respectful manner, as he was always accustomed to do to women and members of the Church. Aramis understood that his audience was at an end; he took his leave of the king in the simple, unpretending language of a country pastor, and disappeared.

"His is, indeed, a remarkable face," said the king, following him with his eyes as long as he could see him, and even to a certain degree when he was no longer to be seen.

"Sire," replied Fouquet, "if that bishop had been educated early in life, no prelate in the kingdom would deserve the highest distinctions better than he."

"His learning is not extensive, then?"

"He changed the sword for the chasuble, and that rather late in life. But it matters little, if your Majesty will permit me to speak of M. de Vannes again in a time and place —"

"I beg you to do so. But before speaking of him, let us speak of yourself, M. Fouquet."

"Of me, Sire?"

"Yes, I have to pay you a thousand compliments."

"I really cannot express to your Majesty the delight with which you overwhelm me."

"Yes, M. Fouquet, I understand you. I confess, however, to have had certain prejudices against you."

"In that case I was indeed unfortunate, Sire."

"But they exist no longer. Did you not perceive —"

"I did indeed, Sire. But I awaited with resignation the day when truth would prevail; and it seems that that day has now arrived."

"Ah! you knew, then, you were in disgrace with me?"

"Alas, Sire, yes!"

"And do you know the reason?"

"Perfectly well; your Majesty thought that I had been wastefully lavish in expenditure."

"Oh, no!"

"Or, rather, an indifferent administrator. In a word, your Majesty thought that as the people had no money there would be none for your Majesty either."

"Yes, I thought so; but I was deceived."

Fouquet bowed.

"And no disturbances, no complaints?"

"And money enough," said Fouquet.

"The fact is that you have been profuse with it during the last month."

"I have more still, not only for all your Majesty's requirements, but for all your caprices."

"Thank Heaven! M. Fouquet," replied the king, seriously, "I will not put you to the proof. For the next two months I do not intend to ask you for anything."

"I will avail myself of the interval to amass for your Majesty five or six millions, which will be serviceable as money in hand in case of war."

"Five or six millions!"

"For the expenses of your Majesty's household only, be it understood."

"You think that war is probable, M. Fouquet?"

"I think that if Heaven has bestowed on the eagle a beak and claws, it is to enable him to show his royal character."

The king blushed with pleasure. "We have spent a

great deal of money these few days past, M. Fouquet; will you not scold me for it?"

"Sire, your Majesty has still twenty years of youth to enjoy, and a thousand million livres to spend in those twenty years."

"A thousand million! that is a great deal of money, M. Fouquet," said the king.

"I will economize, Sire. Besides, your Majesty has two valuable men in M. Colbert and myself. The one will encourage you to be prodigal with your money, — and this shall be myself, if my services should continue to be agreeable to your Majesty; and the other will economize for you, and this will be M. Colbert's province."

"M. Colbert?" returned the king, astonished.

"Certainly, Sire; M. Colbert is an excellent accountant."

At this commendation bestowed by the enemy on the enemy himself, the king felt himself penetrated with confidence and admiration. There was not, moreover, either in Fouquet's voice or look anything which injuriously affected a single syllable of the remark he had made; he did not pass one eulogium, as it were, in order to acquire the right of making two reproaches. The king comprehended him, and yielding to so much generosity and address he said, "You praise M. Colbert, then?"

"Yes, Sire, I praise him; for besides being a man of merit, I believe him to be very devoted to your Majesty's interests."

"Is that because he has often interfered with your own views?" said the king, smiling.

"Exactly, Sire."

"Explain that to me."

"It is simple enough. I am the man who is needed to make the money come in; he, the man who is needed to prevent it from leaving."

"Nay, nay, Monsieur the Superintendent, you will presently say something which will amend all this good opinion?"

"Do you mean so far as administrative abilities are concerned, Sire?"

"Yes."

"Not in the slightest."

"Really?"

"Upon my honor, Sire, I do not know throughout France a better clerk than M. Colbert."

This word "clerk" did not possess, in 1661, the somewhat subservient signification which is attached to it in the present day; but as spoken by Fouquet, whom the king had just addressed as Monsieur the Superintendent, it seemed to acquire an insignificant and petty character, which served admirably to restore Fouquet to his own place, and Colbert to his.

"And yet," said Louis XIV., "it was he, nevertheless, who notwithstanding his economy had the arrangement of my *fêtes* here at Fontainebleau; and I assure you, M. Fouquet, that in no way has he interfered with the expenditure of my money."

Fouquet bowed, but did not reply.

"Is it not your opinion too?" said the king.

"I think, Sire," he replied, "that M. Colbert has done what he had to do in an exceedingly orderly manner, and that he deserves in this respect all the praise your Majesty may bestow upon him."

The word "orderly" was a proper accompaniment for the word "clerk." Louis XIV. possessed that extreme sensitiveness of organization, that delicacy of perception, which pierced through and detected the regular order of feelings and sensations, before the actual sensations themselves; and he therefore comprehended that the clerk had,

in Fouquet's opinion, been too full of method and order in his arrangements, — in other words, that the magnificent *fêtes* of Fontainebleau might have been rendered more magnificent still. The king consequently felt that there was something in the amusements he had provided with which some person or other might be able to find fault; he experienced a little of the annoyance felt by one coming from the provinces to Paris, dressed out in the very best clothes which his wardrobe can furnish, who finds that the fashionably dressed man there looks at him either too much or not enough. This part of the conversation, which Fouquet had carried on with so much moderation yet with such extreme tact, inspired the king with still higher esteem for the character of the man and the capacity of the minister.

Fouquet took his leave at one o'clock in the morning, and the king went to bed a little uneasy and confused at the indirect lesson he had just received; and two good quarters of an hour were employed by him in going over again in his memory the embroideries, the tapestries, the *menus* of the banquets, the architecture of the triumphal arches, the arrangements for the illuminations and fireworks, all ordered by the "clerk Colbert." The result was that the king passed in review before him everything that had taken place during the last week, and decided that several faults could be found in his *fêtes*. But Fouquet by his politeness, his thoughtful consideration, and his generosity had injured Colbert more deeply than the latter by his artifice, his ill-will, and his persevering hatred had ever succeeded in injuring Fouquet.

CHAPTER LII.

FONTAINEBLEAU AT TWO O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING.

As we have seen, De Saint-Aignan had quitted the king's apartment at the very moment when the superintendent entered it. De Saint-Aignan was charged with a mission which required despatch ; that is as much as saying that he was going to do his utmost to turn his time to good account. He whom we have introduced as the king's friend was indeed an uncommon personage. He was one of those valuable courtiers whose vigilance and acuteness of perception at this crisis threw all past and future favorites into the shade, counterbalancing by his close attention the servility of Dangeau, who was not the favorite but the toady of the king.

M. de Saint-Aignan began to consider what was to be done in the present position of affairs. He reflected that his first information ought to come from De Guiche. He therefore set out in search of him ; but De Guiche, whom we saw disappear behind one of the wings of the château, and who seemed to have returned to his own apartments, had not entered the château. De Saint-Aignan therefore went in quest of him ; and after having turned and twisted and searched in every direction, he perceived something like a human form leaning against a tree. This figure was as motionless as a statue, and seemed deeply engaged in looking at a window, although the curtains of this window were closely drawn. As this window happened to be Madame's, De Saint-Aignan con-

cluded that the form in question must be that of De Guiche. He advanced cautiously, and found that he was not mistaken. De Guiche had, after his conversation with Madame, carried away such a weight of happiness that all his strength of mind was hardly sufficient to enable him to support it. On his side, De Saint-Aignan knew that De Guiche had had something to do with La Vallière's introduction to Madame's household, for a courtier knows everything and forgets nothing; but he had never learned under what title or what conditions De Guiche had conferred his protection upon La Vallière. But as in asking a great many questions it is singular if a man does not learn something, De Saint-Aignan reckoned upon learning much or little, as it might be, if he were to question De Guiche with that extreme tact and at the same time with that persistence in attaining an object of which he was capable.

De Saint-Aignan's plan was the following: If the information obtained was satisfactory, he would inform the king with effusion that he had alighted upon a pearl, and would claim the privilege of setting that pearl in the royal crown; if the information were unsatisfactory, — which, after all, might be possible, — he would examine how far the king cared about La Vallière, and make use of his information in such a manner as to get rid of the girl altogether, and thereby obtain all the merit of her banishment with all those ladies of the court who might have any pretensions upon the king's heart, beginning with Madame and ending with the queen. In case the king should show himself obstinate in his fancy, then he would not produce the damaging information he had obtained, but would let La Vallière know that this damaging information was carefully preserved in a secret drawer of her confidant's memory. In this manner he

would be able to display his generosity before the poor girl's eyes, and so keep her in constant suspense between gratitude and apprehension, — to such an extent as to make her a friend at court, interested, as an accomplice, in making her accomplice's fortune while she was making her own. As for the day when the bomb-shell of the past should burst, — supposing there should ever be any occasion for its bursting, — De Saint-Aignan promised himself that he would by that time have taken all possible precautions, and would pretend an entire ignorance of the matter to the king; while with regard to La Vallière, he would still even on that day have an opportunity of being considered the personification of generosity.

It was with such ideas as these, which the fire of covetousness had caused to dawn into being in half an hour, that De Saint-Aignan — the best son in the world, as La Fontaine would have said — set off with the well-defined intention of making De Guiche speak; in other words, to trouble him in his happiness, — a happiness of which De Saint-Aignan was quite ignorant. It was one o'clock in the morning when De Saint-Aignan perceived De Guiche standing motionless, leaning against the trunk of a tree with his eyes fastened upon that lighted window. One o'clock in the morning, — that is, the softest hour of night-time; that which painters crown with myrtles and budding poppies; the hour when eyes are heavy, hearts are throbbing, and heads feel dull and languid; an hour which casts upon the day which has passed away a look of regret, which addresses a loving greeting to the dawn of another. For De Guiche it was the dawn of unutterable happiness; he would have bestowed a treasure upon a beggar, had he stood before him, to secure him an uninterrupted indulgence in his

dreams. It was precisely at this hour that De Saint-Aignan, badly advised (selfishness always counsels badly), came and struck him on the shoulder at the very moment when he was murmuring a word, or rather a name.

"Ah," he cried loudly, "I was looking for you!"

"For me?" said De Guiche, starting.

"Yes; and I find you moon-struck. Is it likely, my dear count, that you have been attacked by the poetical malady, and are making verses?"

The young man forced a smile upon his lips, while a thousand very different feelings were muttering against De Saint-Aignan in the deep recesses of his heart. "Perhaps," he said; "but by what happy chance —"

"Ah! your remark shows that you did not hear what I said."

"How so?"

"Why, I began by telling you I was looking for you."

"You were looking for me?"

"Yes; and I find you now in the very act."

"Of doing what, I should like to know?"

"Of singing the praises of Phyllis."

"Well, I do not deny it," said De Guiche, laughing. "Yes, my dear count, I was celebrating Phyllis's praises."

"And you have acquired the right to do so."

"I?"

"You; no doubt of it, — you, the intrepid protector of every beautiful and clever woman."

"In the name of goodness, what story have you got hold of now?"

"Acknowledged truths, I am well aware. But stay a moment! I am in love."

"You?"

"Yes."

"So much the better, my dear count. Come and tell me all about it;" and De Guiche, afraid that De Saint-Aignan might perhaps presently observe that lighted window, took the count's arm and endeavored to lead him away.

"Oh!" said the latter, resisting, "do not take me towards those dark woods; it is too damp there. Let us stay in the moonlight, if you please;" and while he yielded to the pressure of De Guiche's arm, he tarried in the flower-garden adjoining the château.

"Well," said De Guiche, resigning himself, "lead me where you like, and ask me what you please."

"It is impossible to be more agreeable than you are;" and then, after a moment's silence, De Saint-Aignan continued, "My dear count, I wish you to tell me something about a certain person in whom you have interested yourself."

"And with whom you are in love?"

"I will neither admit nor deny it. You understand that a man does not very readily place his heart where there is no hope of return, and that it is most essential he should take measures of security in advance."

"You are right," said De Guiche, with a sigh; "a heart is a precious gift."

"Mine particularly is very tender, and in that light I present it to you."

"Oh, you are well known, Count! Well?"

"It is simply a question of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Why, my dear Saint-Aignan, you are losing your senses, I should think."

"Why so?"

"I have never shown or taken any interest in Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Bah!"

"Never."

"Was it not you who obtained admission for Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente into Madame's household?"

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente — and you ought to know it better than any one else, my dear count — is of a sufficiently good family to make her presence here desirable, and a greater reason therefore to render her admittance very easy."

"You are jesting."

"No; and upon my honor, I do not know what you mean."

"And you positively had nothing, then, to do with her admission?"

"No."

"You do not know her?"

"I saw her for the first time the day she was presented to Madame. Therefore, as I have never been her patron, as I do not know her, I am not able to give you the information you require;" and De Guiche made a movement as though to leave his questioner.

"Nay, nay, one moment, my dear count," said Saint-Aignan; "you shall not escape me in this manner."

"I beg your pardon, but really it seems to me that it is now time to return to our apartments."

"And yet you were not going in when I — did not meet, but found you."

"Therefore, my dear count," said De Guiche, "as long as you have anything to say to me, I place myself entirely at your service."

"And you are quite right in doing so. What matters half an hour more or less? Your lace will be neither the more nor less rumpled. Will you swear that you have no

injurious communications to make to me about her, and that any injurious communications you might possibly have to make are not the cause of your silence?"

"Oh, I believe the poor child to be as pure as crystal!"

"You overwhelm me with joy. And yet I do not wish to have towards you the appearance of a man so badly informed as I seem. It is quite certain that you supplied the princess's household with the ladies of honor; nay, a song even has been written about it."

"You know, my dear friend, that songs are written about everything."

"Do you know it?"

"No; sing it to me and I shall make its acquaintance."

"I cannot tell you how it begins; I only remember how it ends."

"Very well; at all events, that is something."

"'Guiche is the furnisher
Of the maids of honor.'"

"The idea is weak, and the rhyming is poor."

"What can you expect, my dear fellow? It is not Racine's or Molière's, but La Feuillade's; and a great lord cannot rhyme like a beggarly poet."

"It is very unfortunate, though, that you remember only the termination."

"Stay, stay! I have just recollected the beginning of the second couplet, —

"'He has stocked the birdcage (*volière*),
Montalais and —'"

"*Pardieu!* 'and La Vallière'!" exclaimed De Guiche, impatiently, and completely ignorant, besides, of De Saint-Aignan's object.

"Yes, yes, that is it, — 'La Vallière.' You have hit upon the rhyme, my dear fellow."

"A grand discovery, indeed!"

"Montalais and La Vallière, — these, then, are the two young girls in whom you interested yourself," said De Saint-Aignan, laughing.

"And so Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente's name is not to be met with in the song?"

"No, indeed."

"And you are satisfied, then?"

"Perfectly; but I find Montalais there," said De Saint-Aignan, still laughing.

"Oh, you will find her everywhere; she is a most active young lady."

"You know her?"

"Indirectly. She was the *protégé* of a man named Malicorne, who is a *protégé* of Manicamp. Manicamp asked me to get the situation of maid of honor for Montalais in Madame's household, and a situation for Malicorne, as an officer in Monsieur's household. Well, I asked for the appointments, and you know very well that I have a weakness for that droll fellow Manicamp."

"And you obtained what you sought?"

"For Montalais, yes; for Malicorne, yes and no, — for as yet he is only tolerated there. Do you wish to know anything else?"

"The last word of the couplet still remains, — 'La Vallière,'" said De Saint-Aignan, resuming the smile which had so tormented De Guiche.

"Well," said the latter, "it is true that I obtained admission for her in Madame's household."

"Ah, ah!" said De Saint-Aignan.

"But," continued De Guiche, assuming the greatest coldness of manner, "you will oblige me, my dear count,

not to jest about that name. Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière is a young lady perfectly well-conducted."

"Perfectly well-conducted?"

"Yes."

"Then you have not heard the last rumor?" exclaimed De Saint-Aignan.

"No; and you will do me a service, my dear count, in keeping this report to yourself and to those who circulate it."

"Ah! bah! you take the matter up very seriously."

"Yes; Mademoiselle de la Vallière is beloved by one of my best friends."

De Saint-Aignan started.

"Oh!" he said.

"Yes, Count," continued De Guiche; "and consequently you, the politest man in France, will understand that I cannot allow my friend to be placed in a ridiculous position."

"Oh, very well!" and De Saint-Aignan began to bite his nails, partially from vexation and partially from disappointed curiosity.

De Guiche made him a very profound bow.

"You send me away?" said De Saint-Aignan, who was dying to learn the name of the friend.

"I do not send you away, my dear fellow, — I am going to finish my lines to Phyllis."

"And those lines —"

"Are a quatrain. You understand, I suppose, that a quatrain is a serious affair?"

"Of course."

"And as of these four lines, of which it is naturally composed, I have yet three and a half to make, I need my undivided attention."

"I quite understand. Adieu, Count! By the by —"

"What?"

"Are you quick at making verses?"

"Wonderfully so."

"Will you quite have finished the three lines and a half to-morrow morning?"

"I hope so."

"Adieu, then, until to-morrow."

"Till to-morrow, adieu!"

De Saint-Aignan was obliged to accept the notice to quit; he accordingly did so, and disappeared behind the hedge. Their conversation had led De Guiche and De Saint-Aignan a good distance from the château.

Every mathematician, every poet, and every dreamer has his means of diverting his attention. De Saint-Aignan, then, on leaving De Guiche, found himself at the extremity of the grove, — at the very spot where the outbuildings for the servants begin, and where behind thickets of acacias and chestnut-trees interlacing their branches, which were hidden by masses of clematis and young vines, the wall which separated the woods from the courtyard of these outbuildings was erected. De Saint-Aignan, left alone, took the path which led towards these buildings; De Guiche going off in the very opposite direction. The one proceeded towards the flower-garden, while the other bent his steps towards the walls. De Saint-Aignan walked on between rows of the mountain-ash, lilac, and hawthorn, which formed an almost impenetrable roof above his head; his feet were buried in the soft gravel and in the thick moss. He was deliberating over a means of taking his revenge, which it seemed difficult for him to carry out, and was nonplussed, as Tallemant des Réaux would have said, by not having learned more about La Vallière, notwithstanding the ingenious

tactics he had employed in order to acquire some information about her, when suddenly the sound of human voices attracted his attention. He heard whispers, the complaining tones of a woman's voice mingled with entreaties, smothered laughter, sighs, and half-stifled exclamations of surprise; but above them all, the woman's voice prevailed. De Saint-Aignan stopped to look about him; he perceived with the most intense surprise that the voices proceeded not from the ground but from the branches of the trees. As he glided along under the covered walk, he raised his head, and observed at the top of the wall a woman perched upon a ladder, in eager conversation with a man seated on a branch of a chestnut-tree, whose head alone could be seen, the rest of his body being concealed in the thick covert of the chestnut. The woman was on the near side of the wall, the man on the other side of it.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE LABYRINTH.

De Saint-Aignan, who had only been seeking for information, had met with an adventure. This was indeed a piece of good luck. Curious to learn why, and particularly about what, this man and woman were conversing at such an hour and in such a singular position, De Saint-Aignan made himself as small as he possibly could, and approached almost under the rounds of the ladder. Then taking measures to make himself as comfortable as possible, he leaned his back against a tree and listened, and heard the following conversation. The woman was the first to speak.

"Really, M. Manicamp," she said, in a voice which notwithstanding the reproaches she addressed to him preserved a marked tone of coquetry, "really, your indiscreetness is of a very dangerous character. We cannot talk long in this manner without being observed."

"That is very probable," said the man, in the calmest and coolest of tones.

"In that case, then, what would people say? Oh, if any one were to see me, I declare I should die from very shame!"

"Oh, that would be very silly, and I do not believe you capable of it."

"It might have been different if there had been anything between us; but to do an injury to myself gratui-

tously is really very foolish of me. So, adieu, M. Manicamp!"

"So far, so good; I know the man, and now let me see who the woman is," said De Saint-Aignan, watching the rounds of the ladder on which were standing two pretty little feet covered with sky-blue satin shoes and flesh-colored stockings.

"Nay, nay, for pity's sake, my dear Montalais," cried Manicamp, "deuce take it, do not go away! I have a great many things still to say to you, of the very greatest importance."

"Montalais," said De Saint-Aignan to himself, — "one of the three! Each of the three gossips had her adventure; only, I had thought that the hero of this one's adventure was M. Malicorne and not Manicamp."

At her companion's appeal Montalais stopped in the middle of her descent; and De Saint-Aignan could observe the unfortunate Manicamp climb up from one branch of the chestnut-tree to another, either to improve his situation or to overcome the fatigue consequent upon his cramped position.

"Now listen to me," said he; "you quite understand, I hope, that my intentions are perfectly innocent."

"Of course. But why did you write me that letter stimulating my gratitude towards you? Why did you ask me for an interview at such an hour and in such a place as this?"

"I stimulated your gratitude in reminding you that it was I who had been the means of your entering Madame's household. Because I was most anxiously desirous to obtain the interview which you have been kind enough to grant me, I employed the means which appeared to me the most certain to insure it. And my reason for soliciting it at such an hour and in such a locality was that the

hour seemed to me to be the most prudent and the locality the least open to observation. Moreover, I had occasion to speak to you upon certain subjects which require both prudence and solitude."

"M. Manicamp!"

"But everything perfectly honorable, I assure you."

"I think, M. Manicamp, that it would be more becoming in me to take my leave."

"Nay, listen to me, or I shall jump from my perch here to yours; and be careful how you set me at defiance, for just at this moment a branch of this chestnut-tree causes me a good deal of annoyance and may provoke me to extreme measures. Do not follow the example of this branch, then, but listen to me."

"I am listening, and I will agree to do so; but be brief, for if you have a branch which annoys you, I wish you to understand that a three-cornered round of the ladder is hurting the soles of my feet, and my shoes are being cut through."

"Please to give me your hand, Mademoiselle."

"Why?"

"Will you have the goodness to do so?"

"There is my hand, then; but what are you going to do?"

"To draw you towards me."

"What for? You do not wish me to join you in the tree, I hope?"

"No; but I wish you to sit down upon the wall. There, that will do; there is quite room enough, and I would give a great deal to be allowed to sit down beside you."

"No, no; you are very well where you are. We should be seen."

"Do you really think so?" asked Manicamp, in an insinuating voice.

"I am sure of it."

"Very well; I remain in my tree, then, although I cannot be worse placed."

"M. Manicamp, we are wandering away from the subject."

"You are right."

"You wrote me a letter?"

"I did."

"Why did you write?"

"Fancy that at two o'clock to-day De Guiche left."

"What then?"

"Seeing him set off, I followed him, as I usually do."

"Of course I see that, since you are here now."

"Don't be in a hurry! You are aware, I suppose, that poor De Guiche is up to his very neck in disgrace?"

"Alas! yes."

"It was the very height of imprudence on his part, then, to come to Fontainebleau to seek those who had at Paris sent him away into exile, and particularly those from whom he had been separated."

"M. Manicamp, you reason like Pythagoras of old."

"Moreover, De Guiche is as obstinate as a man in love can be, and he refused to listen to any of my remonstrances. I begged, I implored him, but he would not listen to anything. Oh, the deuce!"

"What's the matter?"

"I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle; but this confounded branch, about which I have already had the honor of speaking to you, has just torn a certain portion of my dress."

"It is quite dark," replied Montalais, laughing; "so pray continue, M. Manicamp."

"De Guiche set off on horseback as hard as he could, I following him, but at a slower pace. You quite under-

stand that to go and throw one's self into the water, for instance, with a friend with the same headlong speed that he himself uses, would be the act either of a fool or of a madman. I therefore allowed De Guiche to get in advance, and I proceeded on my way with a commendable slowness of pace, feeling quite sure that my unfortunate friend would not be received, or if he had been, that he would ride off again at the very first cross, disagreeable answer, and that I should see him returning much faster than he had gone, without having myself gone farther than Ris or Melun, — and that was a good distance, you will admit, for it is eleven leagues to get there and as many to return."

Montalais shrugged her shoulders.

"Laugh as much as you like, Mademoiselle; but if instead of being comfortably seated on the top of the wall, as you are, you were sitting on this branch, as if you were on horseback, you would, like Augustus, aspire to descend."

"Be patient, my dear M. Manicamp, a few minutes are soon passed; you were saying, then, that you had gone beyond Ris and Melun?"

"Yes, I went through Ris and Melun; and I continued to go on, more and more surprised that I did not see him returning; and here I am at last at Fontainebleau. I look for and inquire after De Guiche everywhere; but no one has seen him, no one in the town has spoken to him. He arrived riding at full gallop; he entered the château, where he has disappeared. I have been here at Fontainebleau since eight o'clock this evening inquiring for De Guiche in every direction, but no De Guiche can be found. I am dying from uneasiness. You understand that I have not been running my head into the lion's den in entering the château myself, as my

imprudent friend has done. I came at once to the outbuildings, and I succeeded in getting a letter conveyed to you; and now, Mademoiselle, for Heaven's sake, relieve me from my anxiety."

"There will be no difficulty in that, my dear M. Manicamp; your friend De Guiche has been admirably received."

"Bah!"

"The king gave him a warm reception."

"The king, who exiled him!"

"Madame smiled upon him, and Monsieur appears to like him better than ever."

"Ah!" said Manicamp, "that explains to me, then, why and how he has remained. And did he not say anything about me?"

"Not a word."

"That is very unkind. What is he doing now?"

"In all probability he is asleep; or if not asleep, he is dreaming."

"And what have they been doing all the evening?"

"Dancing."

"The famous ballet? How was De Guiche?"

"Superb."

"Dear fellow! And now, pray forgive me, Mademoiselle; but all that I now have to do is to pass from where I now am to your apartment."

"What do you mean?"

"I cannot suppose that the door of the château will be opened for me at this hour; and as for spending the night upon this branch, I possibly might not object to do so, but I declare the thing to be impossible for any other animal than a popinjay."

"But, M. Manicamp, I cannot introduce a man over the wall in that manner."

"Two, Mademoiselle," said a second voice, but in so timid a tone that it seemed as if its owner felt the utter impropriety of such a request.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Montalais, peering at the foot of the chestnut-tree, "who is that speaking to me?"

"I, Mademoiselle."

"Who are you?"

"Malicorne, your very humble servant;" and as he spoke, he raised himself from the ground to the lowest branches, and thence to the top of the wall.

"M. Malicorne! Gracious heavens! why, you are both mad!"

"How do you do, Mademoiselle?" inquired Malicorne, with great civility.

"I needed but this!" exclaimed Montalais, in despair.

"Oh, Mademoiselle," murmured Malicorne, "do not be so severe, I beseech you!"

"In fact, Mademoiselle," said Manicamp, "we are your friends, and you cannot possibly wish your friends to lose their lives; and to leave us to pass the night where we are is in fact condemning us both to death."

"Oh," said Montalais, "M. Malicorne is so robust that a night passed in the open air with the beautiful stars above him will not do him any harm, and it will be a just punishment for the trick he has played me."

"Be it so, then! Let Malicorne arrange matters with you in the best way he can; I pass over," said Manicamp; and bending down the famous branch against which he had directed such bitter complaints, he succeeded, with the assistance of his hands and feet, in seating himself side by side with Montalais, who tried to push him back, while he endeavored to maintain his position. This conflict, which lasted several seconds, had its pic-

turesque side, which M. de Saint-Aignan certainly found entertaining. But Manicamp won, and having taken possession of the ladder placed his foot on it, and then gallantly offered his hand to his fair antagonist. While this was going on, Malicorne had installed himself in the chestnut-tree, in the very place Manicamp had just left, determining within himself to succeed him in the one which he now occupied. Manicamp and Montalais descended a few rounds of the ladder, Manicamp insisting, and Montalais laughing and objecting.

Suddenly Malicorne's voice was heard in tones of entreaty: "I entreat you, Mademoiselle, not to leave me here. My position is very insecure, and I cannot, unaided, reach the other side of the wall without accident. It does not matter if Manicamp tears his clothes, for he can make use of M. de Guiche's wardrobe; but I shall not be able to use even those belonging to M. Manicamp, for they will be torn."

"My opinion," said Manicamp, without taking any notice of Malicorne's lamentations, "is that the best thing to be done is for me to go and look for De Guiche without delay; for by and by perhaps I may not be able to get to his apartments."

"That is my own opinion too," replied Montalais; "so go at once, M. Manicamp."

"A thousand thanks. Adieu, Mademoiselle," said Manicamp, jumping to the ground; "your kindness cannot possibly be exceeded."

"Do not mention it, M. Manicamp; I am now going to get rid of M. Malicorne." Malicorne sighed. "Go, go!" continued Montalais.

Manicamp went away a few paces, but returning to the foot of the ladder, said, "By the by, Mademoiselle, which is the way to M. de Guiche's?"

"Ah, nothing is easier! You go along by the hedge until you reach a place where the paths cross."

"Yes."

"You will see four paths."

"Exactly."

"One of which you will take."

"Which of them?"

"That to the right."

"To the right?"

"No, — to the left."

"The deuce!"

"No, no! wait a minute — "

"You do not seem to be quite sure. Think again, I beg you, Mademoiselle."

"You take the middle path."

"But there are four."

"So there are. All that I know is that one of the four paths leads straight to Madame's apartments; and with that one I am well acquainted."

"But M. de Guiche is not in Madame's apartments, I suppose?"

"No, indeed."

"Well, then, the path which leads to Madame's apartments is of no use to me, and I would willingly exchange it for that which leads to where M. de Guiche is lodging."

"Of course, and I know that as well; but as for indicating from where we are, it seems to be quite impossible."

"Well, then, Mademoiselle, let us suppose that I have succeeded in finding that fortunate path."

"In that case you are almost there; for you have nothing else to do but to cross the labyrinth."

"Nothing more than that? The deuce! so there is a labyrinth as well?"

"Yes, and complicated enough too; even in daylight one may sometimes be deceived. There are turnings and windings without end; in the first place, you must turn three times to the right, then twice to the left, then turn once — Stay! is it once or twice, though? At all events, when you get clear of the labyrinth you will see an avenue of sycamores; and this avenue leads straight to the pavilion in which M. de Guiche is lodging."

"Nothing could be more clearly indicated, Mademoiselle," said Manicamp; "and I have not the slightest doubt in the world that if I were to follow your directions I should lose my way immediately. I have therefore a slight service to ask of you."

"What may that be?"

"That you will offer me your arm and guide me yourself, like another — like another — I used to know mythology, Mademoiselle, but other important matters have made me forget it; pray, come with me, then?"

"And am I to be abandoned, then?" cried Malicorne.

"It is quite impossible, Monsieur," said Montalais to Manicamp; "I might be seen with you at such an hour, and then just think what would be said of me!"

"Your own conscience would acquit you, Mademoiselle," said Manicamp, sententiously.

"Impossible, Monsieur, impossible!"

"In that case let me assist Malicorne to get down; he is a very intelligent fellow, and possesses a very keen scent. He will guide me; and if we lose ourselves, both of us will be lost, and the one will save the other. If we are together, and should be met by any one, we shall look as if we had some matter of business in hand; while alone I should have the appearance either of a lover or of a robber. Come, Malicorne; here is the ladder."

"M. Malicorne," cried Montalais, "I forbid you to leave your tree, and that under pain of incurring my anger."

Malicorne had already stretched out one leg towards the top of the wall and sadly withdrawn it, when Manicamp said in a whisper, "Hush!"

"What 's the matter?" inquired Montalais.

"I hear footsteps."

"Good heavens!"

In fact, the fancied footsteps soon became a reality; the foliage was pushed aside, and De Saint-Aignan appeared with a smile on his lips and his hand stretched out towards them, taking every one by surprise in their particular position, — that is to say, Malicorne upon the tree with his head stretched out, Montalais upon the rounds of the ladder and clinging to it tightly, and Manicamp on the ground with his foot advanced ready to set off. "Ah, good-evening, Manicamp!" said the count. "I am glad to see you, my dear fellow; we missed you this evening, and a good many inquiries have been made about you. Mademoiselle de Montalais, your most obedient servant."

Montalais blushed. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed, hiding her face in both her hands.

"Mademoiselle," said De Saint-Aignan, "pray reassure yourself. I know how entirely innocent you are, and I shall give a good account of you. Manicamp, do you follow me. The hedge, the cross-paths, and labyrinth, — I am well acquainted with them all; I will be your Ariadne. There, now! your mythological name is found at last."

"Perfectly true, Count."

"And take M. Malicorne away with you at the same time, Count," said Montalais.

"No, indeed," said Malicorne. "M. Manicamp has

conversed with you as long as he liked, and now it is my turn, if you please, Mademoiselle. I, too, have a multitude of things to tell you about our future prospects."

"You hear," said the count, laughing; "stay with him, Mademoiselle! This is indeed a night for secrets;" and taking Manicamp's arm, the count led him rapidly away in the direction of the road which Montalais knew so well and indicated so badly. Montalais followed them with her eyes as long as she could perceive them.

CHAPTER LIV.

HOW MALICORNE HAD BEEN TURNED OUT OF THE HOTEL OF THE BEAU PAON.

WHILE Montalais was engaged in looking after the count and Manicamp, Malicorne had taken advantage of the young girl's attention being drawn away to render his position somewhat more tolerable; and when she turned round, she immediately noticed the change which had taken place in his position, — for he had seated himself, like a monkey, upon the wall, with his feet resting upon the top rounds of the ladder. The foliage of the wild vine and the honeysuckle curled round his head, making him look like a faun, while the twisted ivy branches represented tolerably well the cloven feet. As for Montalais, she required nothing to complete her resemblance to a dryad. "Well," she said, ascending another round of the ladder, "are you resolved to render me unhappy? Have you not persecuted me enough, tyrant that you are?"

"I a tyrant?" said Malicorne.

"Yes, you are always compromising me, M. Malicorne; you are a perfect monster of wickedness."

"I?"

"What have you to do with Fontainebleau? Is not Orléans your place of residence?"

"Do you ask me what I have to do here? I wanted to see you."

"Ah, great need of that!"

"Not so far as concerns yourself, perhaps, but most certainly so far as I am concerned. Mademoiselle, you know very well that I have left my home, and that for the future I have no other place of residence than that which you may happen to have. As you therefore are staying at Fontainebleau at the present moment, I have come to Fontainebleau."

Montalais shrugged her shoulders. "You wished to see me, did you not?" she said.

"Of course."

"Very well, you have seen me, you are satisfied; so now go away."

"Oh, no!" said Malicorne; "I came to talk with you as well as to see you."

"Very well, we will talk by and by and in another place than this."

"By and by! Heaven only knows if I shall meet you by and by in another place. We shall never find a more favorable one than this."

"But I cannot this evening; at this moment I cannot."

"Why not?"

"Because a thousand things have happened to-night."

"Well, then, my affair will make a thousand and one."

"No, no; Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente is waiting for me in our room to communicate something of the very greatest importance."

"How long has she been waiting?"

"For an hour at least."

"In that case," said Malicorne, tranquilly, "she will wait a few minutes longer."

"M. Malicorne," said Montalais, "you are forgetting yourself."

"That is to say that you are forgetting me, Mademoiselle, and that I am getting impatient at the part you

make me play here, *mordieu!* For the last week, Mademoiselle, I have been prowling about among you all, and you have not deigned once to notice my presence here."

"Have you been prowling about here for a week, M. Malicorne?"

"Like a wolf; sometimes I have been burned by the fireworks, which have singed two of my wigs; at others, I have been completely drenched in the osiers by the evening damps or the spray from the fountains, — always half famished, always fatigued to death, with the view of a wall always before me, and the prospect of having to scale it perhaps. Upon my word, Mademoiselle, this is not the sort of life for any one to lead who is neither a squirrel nor a salamander nor an otter; and since you drive your inhumanity so far as to wish to make me renounce my condition as a man, I proclaim it openly. A man I am, *mordieu!* and a man I will remain, subject to superior orders."

"Well, then, tell me, what do you wish, what do you require, what do you demand?" said Montalais, in a submissive tone.

"Do you mean to tell me that you did not know that I was at Fontainebleau?"

"I —"

"Be frank."

"I suspected so."

"Well, then, could you not have contrived during the last week to have seen me once a day at least?"

"I have always been prevented, M. Malicorne."

"Fiddlestick!"

"Ask my companions, if you do not believe me."

"I shall ask no one to explain matters which I know better than any one."

"Compose yourself, M. Malicorne; things will change."

"They must, indeed."

"You know that whether I see you or not, I am thinking of you," said Montalais, in a coaxing tone of voice.

"Oh, you are thinking of me, are you? Well, and is there anything new?"

"What about?"

"About my post in Monsieur's household."

"Ah, my dear M. Malicorne, no one has ventured lately to approach his royal Highness."

"Well, but now?"

"Now it is quite a different thing; since yesterday he has left off being jealous."

"Bah! and how has his jealousy subsided?"

"There has been a diversion."

"Tell me all about it."

"A report was spread that the king had fallen in love with some one else, and Monsieur was tranquillized immediately."

"And who spread the report?"

Montalais lowered her voice. "Between ourselves," she said, "I think that Madame and the king have an understanding about it."

"Ah!" said Malicorne; "that was the only way to manage it. But what about poor M. de Guiche?"

"Oh, as for him, he is completely turned off!"

"Have they been writing to each other?"

"No, certainly not; I have not seen a pen in either of their hands for the last week."

"On what terms are you with Madame?"

"The very best."

"And with the king?"

"The king always smiles at me whenever I pass him.'

"Good. Now tell me whom have the two lovers selected to serve for their screen?"

"La Vallière."

"Oh, oh, poor girl! We must prevent that, my dear."

"Why?"

"Because, if M. Raoul de Bragelonne were to suspect it, he would either kill her or kill himself."

"Raoul, poor fellow! do you think so?"

"Women pretend to have a knowledge of the state of people's affections," said Malicorne, "and they do not even know how to read the thoughts of their own minds. Well, I can tell you that M. de Bragelonne loves La Vallière to such a degree that if she pretended to deceive him, he would, I repeat, either kill himself or kill her."

"But the king is there to defend her," said Montalais.

"The king!" exclaimed Malicorne; "Raoul would kill the king as he would a Dutch dragoon."

"Good heavens!" said Montalais; "you are mad, M. Malicorne."

"Not in the least. Everything I have told you is, on the contrary, perfectly serious, my dear; and for my own part I know one thing."

"What is that?"

"That I shall quietly tell Raoul of the trick."

"Hush, you wretch!" said Montalais, ascending another round of the ladder, so as to approach Malicorne more closely; "do not open your lips to poor Bragelonne!"

"Why not?"

"Because as yet you know nothing at all."

"What is the matter, then?"

"Why, this evening — But no one is listening, I hope?"

"No."

"This evening, then, beneath the royal oak La Vallière said aloud, and innocently enough, these words, 'I cannot conceive that when one has seen the king, one can ever love another man.'"

Malicorne almost bounced off the wall. "Unhappy girl! did she really say that?"

"Word for word."

"And she thinks so?"

"La Vallière always thinks what she says."

"That positively cries aloud for vengeance. Why, women are serpents!" said Malicorne.

"Compose yourself, my dear Malicorne, compose yourself."

"No, no; let us strike at the roots of the evil, on the contrary. Let us warn Raoul; it is time."

"Blunderer! on the contrary, it is too late," replied Montalais.

"How so?"

"La Vallière's remark, which was intended for the king, reached its destination."

"The king knows it, then? The king was told of it, I suppose?"

"The king heard it."

"*Ohimé!* as the cardinal used to say."

"The king was in the thicket close to the royal oak."

"It follows, then," said Malicorne, "that for the future the plan which the king and Madame have arranged will go as easily as if it were on wheels, and will pass over poor Bragelonne's body."

"Precisely so."

"It is terrible!"

"So it is."

"Upon my word," said Malicorne, after a moment's silence devoted to meditation, "do not let us interpose our poor selves between a large oak-tree and a great king, for we should certainly be ground to pieces."

"The very thing I was going to say to you."

"Let us think of ourselves, then."

"My own idea."

"Open your beautiful eyes, then."

"And you your large ears.'

"Approach your little mouth for a good big kiss."

"Here," said Montalais, who paid the debt immediately in ringing coin.

"Now let us consider. First, we have M. de Guiche, who is in love with Madame; then La Vallière, who is in love with the king; next, the king, who is in love both with Madame and La Vallière; lastly, Monsieur, who loves no one but himself. Among all these loves a noodle would make his fortune; a greater reason, therefore, for sensible people like ourselves to do so."

"There you are with your dreams again!"

"Nay, rather with my realities. Let yourself be led by me, darling. You have not been very badly off hitherto, have you?"

"No."

"Well, the future will agree with the past. Only, since all here think of themselves before anything else, let us do so too."

"Perfectly right."

"But of ourselves only."

"Be it so."

"An offensive and defensive alliance."

"I am ready to swear it."

"Put out your hand, then, and say, 'All for Malicorne.'"

"All for Malicorne."

"And I 'All for Montalais,'" responded Malicorne, stretching out his hand in his turn.

"And now what is to be done!"

"Keep your eyes and ears constantly open; collect every means of attack which may be serviceable against

others; never let anything lie about which can be used against ourselves."

"Agreed."

"Decided."

"Sworn to; and now that the agreement is entered into, good-by."

"What do you mean by 'good-by'?"

"Of course you can now return to your inn."

"To my inn?"

"Yes; are you not lodging at the sign of the Beau Paon?"

"Montalais, Montalais! you now see that you were aware of my being at Fontainebleau."

"Well, and what does that prove except that I occupied myself about you more than you deserve, ingrate?"

"Hum!"

"Go back, then, to the Beau Paon."

"That is now quite out of the question."

"Have you not a room there?"

"I had, but I have it no longer."

"You have it no longer? and who has taken it from you?"

"I will tell you. Some little time ago I was returning there, after I had been running about after you; and having reached my hotel quite out of breath, I perceived a litter, upon which four peasants were carrying a sick monk."

"A monk?"

"Yes, an old gray-bearded Franciscan. As I was looking at this sick monk, they entered the hotel; and as they were carrying him up the staircase, I followed; and as I reached the top of the staircase, I observed that they took him into my room."

"Into your room?"

"Yes, into my own apartment. Supposing it to be a mistake, I summoned the landlord, who says that the room which had been let to me for the past eight days was let to the Franciscan for the ninth."

"Oh! oh!"

"That was exactly what I said; nay, I did even more, for I was inclined to get out of temper. I went upstairs again; I spoke to the Franciscan himself, and wished to prove to him the impropriety of his step, when this monk, dying though he seemed to be, raised himself upon his arm, fixed a pair of blazing eyes upon me, and in a voice which was admirably suited to command a charge of cavalry, said, 'Turn this fellow out of doors!' which order was immediately executed by the landlord and the four porters, who made me descend the staircase somewhat faster than was agreeable. This is how it happens, dearest, that I have no lodging."

"Who can this Franciscan be?" said Montalais. "Is he a general?"

"Precisely; it seems to me that that is the title which one of the porters gave him as he spoke to him in a low tone."

"So that —" said Montalais.

"So that I have no room, no hotel, no lodging; and I am as determined as my friend Manicamp was just now, not to pass the night in the open air."

"What is to be done, then?" said Montalais.

"Nothing easier," said a third voice, whereupon Montalais and Malicorne uttered a simultaneous cry, and De Saint-Aignan appeared. "Dear M. Malicorne," said De Saint-Aignan, "a very lucky accident has brought me back to extricate you from your embarrassment. Come, I can offer you a room in my own apartments, of which I can assure you no Franciscan will

deprive you. As for you, my dear young lady, be easy! I already knew Mademoiselle de la Vallière's secret and that of Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; your own you have just been kind enough to confide to me, for which I thank you. I can keep three quite as well as one only." Malicorne and Montalais looked at each other, like two children detected in a theft; but as Malicorne saw a great advantage in the proposition which had been made to him, he gave Montalais a sign of resignation, which she returned. Malicorne then descended the ladder, round by round, reflecting at every step upon the means of obtaining piecemeal from M. de Saint-Aignan all he might possibly know about the famous secret. Montalais had already darted away as fleet as a deer, and neither cross-road nor labyrinth was able to mislead her. As for De Saint-Aignan, he carried off Malicorne with him to his apartments, showing him a thousand attentions, enchanted to have close at hand the very two men who, supposing that De Guiche were to remain silent, could give him the best information about the maids of honor.

CHAPTER LV.

WHAT ACTUALLY DID OCCUR AT THE INN CALLED THE BEAU PAON.

In the first place, let us supply our readers with a few details about the inn called the Beau Paon; then we will pass to the description of the travellers who were residing there. The inn of the Beau Paon, like every inn, owed its name to its sign; and this represented a peacock spreading out its tail. But in imitation of some painters who had bestowed the face of a handsome young man upon the serpent which tempted Eve, the painter of this sign had conferred upon the "beautiful peacock" the features of a woman. This inn — a living epigram against that half of the human race which renders existence delightful, as M. Legouvé says — was situated at Fontainebleau, in the first turning on the left-hand side, which divides on the road from Paris that large artery which constitutes in itself alone the entire town of Fontainebleau. The side street in question was then known as the Rue de Lyon, doubtless because, geographically, it advanced in the direction of the second capital of the kingdom.

On the street itself were two houses occupied by tradespeople, the houses being separated by two large gardens bordered with hedges. Apparently, however, there were three houses in the street. Let us explain how, notwithstanding appearances, there were only two.

The inn of the Beau Paon had its principal front towards the main street; but upon the Rue de Lyon

there were two ranges of buildings divided by court-yards, which comprised sets of apartments for the reception of all classes of travellers, whether on foot or on horseback, or even with their own carriages; and in which could be supplied, not only board and lodging, but also accommodation for exercise and solitude for the wealthiest courtiers, whenever after having received some check at the court they wished to shut themselves up with their own society, either to swallow an affront or to brood over their revenge. From the windows of this back part of the building the travellers could perceive, in the first place, the street with the grass growing between the stones, which were being gradually loosened by it; next, the beautiful hedges of elder and thorn, which embraced, as though within two green and flowering arms, the citizens' houses of which we have spoken; and then, in the spaces between those houses, forming the ground-work of the picture, and appearing like an almost impassable barrier, a line of thick trees, the advanced sentinels of the vast forest which extends itself in front of Fontainebleau. It was therefore easy, provided one secured an apartment at the angle of the building, to obtain by the main street from Paris a view of the passers-by and the festivities as well as to hear them, and by the Rue de Lyon to look upon and to enjoy the calm of the country; and this without reckoning that in cases of urgent necessity, at the very moment when people might be knocking at the principal door in the Rue de Paris, one could make one's escape by the little door in the Rue de Lyon, and creeping along the gardens of the private houses attain the outskirts of the forest.

Malicorne, who it will be remembered was the first to bring to our notice this inn, in deploring his being turned out of it, having been absorbed in his own affairs, was far

from having told Montalais all that could be said about this curious inn; and we will try to repair Malicorne's grievous omission. He had not thought to tell, for instance, in what way he had gained admission into this inn; and moreover, with the exception of the few words he had said about the Franciscan friar, he had not given any particulars about the travellers who were staying there. The manner in which they had arrived, the manner in which they lived, the difficulty which existed for every one but certain privileged travellers in entering the hotel without a password and in living there without certain preparatory precautions, must have struck Malicorne, and we will venture to say really did so. But Malicorne, as we have already said, had some personal matters of his own to occupy his attention, which prevented his paying much attention to others. In fact, all the apartments of the hotel were engaged and retained by certain strangers, who never went out, who were incommunicative in their address, whose countenances were full of thoughtful occupation, and not one of whom was known to Malicorne. Every one of these travellers had arrived at the hotel since his own arrival there. Each man had gained entrance by giving a kind of password, which had at first attracted Malicorne's attention; but having inquired in an indirect manner about it, he had been informed that the host had given as a reason for this extreme vigilance, that, as the town was so full of wealthy noblemen, it must also be as full of clever and zealous pickpockets. The reputation of an honest inn like that of the Beau Paon was concerned in not allowing its visitors to be robbed. It occasionally happened, also, that Malicorne asked himself, as he thought matters carefully over in his mind and reflected upon his own position in the inn, how it was that they had

allowed him to become an inmate of the hotel, while he had observed since his residence there admission refused to so many. He asked himself, too, how it was that when Manicamp, who in his opinion must be a man to be looked upon with veneration by everybody, wished to bait his horse at the Beau Paon, on arriving there both horse and rider had been turned away with a *nescio vos* of the most positive character. All this for Malicorne, whose mind was fully occupied by his own love-affair and his personal ambition, was a problem he had not applied himself to solve. Had he wished to do so, we should hardly venture to say, notwithstanding the intelligence we have attributed to him, that he would have succeeded.

A few words will prove to the reader that nothing less than Œdipus in person could have solved the enigma in question. During the week seven travellers had taken up their abode in the inn, all of them having arrived there the day after the fortunate day on which Malicorne had fixed his choice on the Beau Paon. These seven persons, accompanied by a suitable retinue, were the following:—

First of all, a brigadier in the German army, his secretary, physician, three servants, and seven horses. The brigadier's name was the Comte von Wostpur.

A Spanish cardinal, with two nephews, two secretaries, an officer of his household, and twelve horses. The cardinal's name was Monseigneur Herrebia.

A rich merchant of Bremen, with his manservant and his horses. This merchant's name was Meinheer Bonstett.

A Venetian senator, with his wife and daughter, both extremely beautiful. The senator's name was Signor Marini.

A Scotch laird, with seven Highlanders of his clan, all on foot. The laird's name was MacCumnor.

An Austrian from Vienna, without title or coat-of-arms, who had arrived in a carriage, — a good deal of the priest, and something of the soldier. He was called "the Councillor."

And finally, a Flemish lady, with a manservant, a lady's-maid, and a female companion, a large retinue, great display, and immense horses. She was called "the Flemish lady."

All these travellers had arrived on the same day, we have said; and yet their arrival had occasioned no confusion in the inn, no stoppage in the street. Their apartments had been fixed upon beforehand, by the order of their couriers or their secretaries, who had arrived the previous evening or the same morning. Malicorne, who had arrived the previous day, riding an ill-conditioned horse, with a slender valise, had announced himself at the hotel of the Beau Paon as the friend of a nobleman desirous of witnessing the festivities, and who would himself arrive almost immediately. The landlord, on hearing these words, had smiled as if he were perfectly well acquainted either with Malicorne or with his friend the nobleman, and had said to him, "Since you are the first arrival, Monsieur, choose what apartment you please." This was said with that obsequiousness of manners, so full of meaning with landlords, which means, "Make yourself perfectly easy, Monsieur; we know with whom we have to do, and you will be treated accordingly." These words, with their accompanying gesture, Malicorne had thought very friendly, but rather obscure. However, as he did not wish to be very extravagant in his expenses, and as he thought that if he were to ask for a small apartment he would doubtless have been refused on ac-

count of his want of consequence, he hastened to close at once with the innkeeper's remark, and deceive him with a cunning equal to his own. So, smiling like a man for whom whatever might be done was but simply his due, he said, "My dear host, I shall take the best and the gayest room in the house."

"With a stable?"

"Yes, with a stable."

"And when will you take it?"

"Immediately, if it be possible."

"Quite so."

"But," Malicorne hastened to add, "I shall leave the large room unoccupied for the present."

"Very good!" said the landlord, with an air of much intelligence.

"Certain reasons, which you will understand by and by, oblige me to take, at my own cost, only this small room."

"Yes, yes," said the host.

"When my friend arrives, he will occupy the large apartment; and as a matter of course, as this large apartment will be his own affair, he will settle for it himself."

"Certainly," said the landlord, "certainly; it was so understood."

"It was so understood?"

"Word for word."

"It is extraordinary," murmured Malicorne. "You quite understand, then?"

"Yes."

"There is nothing more to be said. Since, then, you understand — for you do clearly understand, do you not? — "

"Perfectly."

"Very well, you may show me to my room."

The landlord, cap in hand, preceded Malicorne, who installed himself in his room, and became more and more surprised to observe that the landlord at every ascent or descent looked and winked at him in a manner which indicated the best possible intelligence between them. "There is some mistake here," said Malicorne to himself; "but until it is cleared up, I shall take the advantage of it, which is the best thing I can possibly do;" and he darted out of his room like a hunting-dog following up a scent, in search of all the news and curiosities of the court, getting himself burned in one place and drowned in another, as he had told Mademoiselle de Montalais. The day after he had been installed in his room he had noticed the seven travellers arrive one after the other, filling the whole hotel. At the sight of all those people, of all those carriages, of all that retinue, Malicorne rubbed his hands delightedly, thinking that one day later he should not have found a bed to lie upon after his return from his exploring expeditions. When all the travellers were lodged, the landlord entered Malicorne's room, and with his accustomed courteousness said to him, "You are aware, my dear monsieur, that the large room in the third detached building is still reserved for you?"

"Of course I am aware of it."

"I am really making you a present of it."

"Thank you."

"So that when your friend comes —"

"Well!"

"He will be satisfied with me, I hope; or if he be not, he will be very difficult to please."

"Excuse me, but will you allow me to say a few words about my friend?"

"Of course, for you have a perfect right to do so."

"He intended to come, as you know."

"And he does so still."

"He may possibly have changed his intention."

"No."

"You are quite sure, then?"

"Quite sure."

"But in case you should have some doubt."

"Well!"

"I can only say that I do not positively assure you that he will come."

"Yet he told you —"

"He certainly did tell me. But you know that 'Man proposes but God disposes;' *verba volant, scripta manent.*"

"Which is as much as to say —"

"That what is spoken flies away, and what is written remains; and as he did not write to me, but contented himself by saying to me, 'I will authorize you, yet without specially inviting you,' you must feel that it places me in a very embarrassing position."

"What do you authorize me to do, then?"

"Why, to let your rooms if you find a good tenant for them."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"Never will I do such a thing, Monsieur! If he has not written to you, he has written to me."

"Ah! what does he say? Let us see if his letter agrees with his words."

"These are almost his very words: —

"'To the Landlord of the Beau Paon Hotel, — You will have been informed of the meeting arranged to take place in your hotel between some persons of importance; I shall be one of those who will assemble at Fontainebleau. Keep for

me, then, a small room for a friend who will arrive either before or after me—'

And you are the friend, I suppose," said the landlord, interrupting his reading of the letter. Malicorne bowed modestly. The landlord resumed:—

"'And a large apartment for myself. The large apartment is my own affair; but I wish the price of the smaller room to be moderate, as it is destined for a fellow who is deucedly poor.'

It is still you of whom he is speaking, is it not?" said the host.

"Oh, certainly!" said Malicorne.

"Then we are agreed; your friend will settle for his apartment, and you for your own."

"May I be broken alive upon the wheel," said Malicorne to himself, "if I understand anything at all about it!" And then he said aloud, "Well, then, are you satisfied with the name?"

"With what name?"

"With the name at the end of the letter. Does it give you the guarantee you require?"

"I was going to ask you his name," said the host.

"What! was not the letter signed?"

"No," said the host, opening his eyes very wide, full of mystery and curiosity.

"In that case," replied Malicorne, imitating his gesture and his mysterious look,—"if he has not given you his name, you understand, he must have his reasons for it."

"Oh, of course!"

"And therefore that I, his friend, his confidant, must not betray his incognito."

"You are perfectly right, Monsieur," replied the landlord, "and therefore I do not insist upon it."

"I appreciate your delicacy. As for myself, as my friend told you, my room is a separate affair; so let us come to terms about it. Short accounts make good friends, you know. How much is it?"

"There is no hurry."

"Never mind, — let us reckon it up, all the same: room, my own board, a place in the stable for my horse, and his feed. How much per day?"

"Four livres, Monsieur."

"Which will make twelve livres for the three days I have been here?"

"Twelve livres, — yes, Monsieur."

"Here are your twelve livres, then."

"But why settle now, Monsieur?"

"Because," said Malicorne, lowering his voice and resorting to his former air of mystery, seeing that mystery helped him on, — "because if I had to set off suddenly, to decamp at any moment, my account would be already settled."

"You are right, Monsieur."

"I may consider myself at home, then?"

"Perfectly."

"So far, so good. Adieu!" and the landlord withdrew. Malicorne, left alone, reasoned with himself in the following manner: "No one but M. de Guiche or Manicamp could have written to mine host, — M. de Guiche, because he wishes to secure a lodging for himself beyond the precincts of the court, in the event of his success or failure, as the case may be; Manicamp, because M. de Guiche may have intrusted him with his commission. And M. de Guiche or Manicamp will have argued in this manner: the large apartment to receive in a befitting manner a lady very thickly veiled, affording to the lady in question a second means of exit, —

into a street somewhat deserted and closely adjoining the forest; the smaller room either to shelter Manicamp for a time, who is M. de Guiche's confidant and would be the vigilant keeper of the door, or for M. de Guiche himself, acting for greater safety the part of master and that of confidant at the same time. Yet," he continued, "how about this meeting which is to take place, and which indeed has actually taken place, in this hotel? No doubt they are persons who are going to be presented to the king. And the 'poor devil' for whom the smaller room is destined is a trick, in order the better to conceal De Guiche or Manicamp. If this be the case, — as very likely it is, — there is only half the mischief done; for there is simply the length of one's purse-strings between Manicamp and Malicorne."

After he had thus reasoned the matter out, Malicorne had slept soundly, leaving the seven strangers to occupy, and to survey in every sense of the word, their several lodgings in the hotel. Whenever there was nothing at court to disquiet him, when he was weary of excursions and investigations, and of writing letters which he could never find an opportunity of delivering according to their address, he then returned home to his comfortable little room, and leaning upon the balcony, which was filled with nasturtiums and white pinks, Malicorne began to think over these strange travellers, for whom Fontainebleau seemed to possess no attractions in its illuminations or amusements or *fêtes*. Things went on in this manner until the seventh day, — a day of which we have given such full details, with its night also, in the preceding chapters. On that night Malicorne was enjoying the fresh air, seated at his window, towards one o'clock in the morning, when Manicamp appeared on horseback with a thoughtful and listless air.

"Good!" said Malicorne to himself, recognizing him at the first glance; "there 's my friend who has come to take possession of his apartment, — that is to say, of my room;" and he called to Manicamp, who looked up and immediately recognized Malicorne.

"Ah, by Jove!" said the former, his countenance clearing up; "glad to see you, Malicorne! I have been wandering about Fontainebleau, looking for three things I cannot find, — De Guiche, a room, and a stable."

"Of M. de Guiche I cannot give you either good or bad news, for I have not seen him; but so far as concerns your room and a stable, that 's another matter, for they have been retained here for you."

"Retained, — and by whom?"

"By yourself, I suppose."

"By me?"

"Do you mean to say that you have not engaged lodgings here?"

"By no means!" said Manicamp.

At this moment the landlord appeared in the doorway.

"I require a room," said Manicamp.

"Have you engaged one, Monsieur?"

"No."

"Then I have no rooms to let."

"In that case I have engaged a room," said Manicamp.

"A room simply, or lodgings?"

"Anything you please."

"By letter?" inquired the landlord.

Malicorne nodded affirmatively to Manicamp.

"Of course by letter," said Manicamp. "Did you not receive a letter from me?"

"What was the date of the letter?" inquired the host, in whom Manicamp's hesitation had aroused suspicion.

Manicamp scratched his ear, and looked up at Malicorne's window; but Malicorne had left his window and was coming down the stairs to his friend's assistance. At the very same moment a traveller wrapped up in a long Spanish cloak appeared at the porch, near enough to hear the conversation.

"I ask you what was the date of the letter you wrote to me to retain apartments here?" repeated the landlord, again pressing his question.

"Last Wednesday was the date," said the mysterious stranger, in a soft and polished tone of voice, touching the landlord on the shoulder.

Manicamp drew back; and it was now Malicorne's turn, who appeared on the threshold, to scratch his ear.

The landlord saluted the new arrival as a man who recognizes his true guest. "Monsieur," he said to him with civility, "your apartment is ready for you, and the stables too; only—" He looked round him, and inquired, "Your horses?"

"My horses may or may not arrive. That, however, matters but little to you, provided you are paid for what has been engaged."

The landlord bowed still lower.

"You have," continued the unknown traveller, "kept for me, besides, the small room for which I asked you."

"Oh!" said Malicorne, endeavoring to hide himself.

"Monsieur, your friend has occupied it during the last week," said the landlord, pointing to Malicorne, who was trying to make himself as small as possible.

The traveller, drawing his cloak round him so as to cover the lower part of his face, cast a rapid glance at Malicorne, and said, "This gentleman is no friend of mine."

The landlord almost started off his feet.

"I am not acquainted with this gentleman," continued the traveller.

"What!" exclaimed the host, turning to Malicorne, "are you not this gentleman's friend, then?"

"What does it matter whether I am or not, provided you are paid?" said Malicorne, parodying the stranger's remark in a very majestic manner.

"It matters so far as this," said the landlord, who began to perceive that one person had been taken for another, "that I beg you, Monsieur, to leave the rooms, which had been engaged beforehand, and by some other person than you."

"Still," said Malicorne, "this gentleman cannot require at the same time a room on the first floor and an apartment on the second. If this gentleman will take the room, I will take the apartment; if he prefers the apartment, I will keep the room."

"I am exceedingly distressed, Monsieur," said the traveller, in his soft voice; "but I need both the room and the apartment."

"At least, tell me for whom?" inquired Malicorne.

"The apartment I require for myself."

"Very well; but the room?"

"Look!" said the traveller, pointing towards a sort of procession which was approaching.

Malicorne looked in the direction indicated, and observed, borne upon a litter, the arrival of the Franciscan, whose installation in his own room he had, with a few details of his own, related to Montalais, and whom he had so uselessly endeavored to convert to humbler views. The result of the arrival of the unknown traveller and of the sick Franciscan was Malicorne's expulsion, without any consideration for his feelings, from the inn of the Beau Paon by the landlord and the peasants who had

carried the Franciscan. The details of what followed this expulsion have already been given, — of Manicamp's conversation with Montalais; how Manicamp, with greater cleverness than Malicorne had shown, had succeeded in obtaining news of De Guiche; of the subsequent conversation of Montalais with Malicorne; and, finally, of the lodgings with which the Comte de Saint-Aignan had furnished Manicamp and Malicorne. It remains for us to inform our readers who were the traveller with the cloak — the principal tenant of the double apartment of which Malicorne had only occupied a portion — and the Franciscan, quite as mysterious a personage, whose arrival, together with that of the stranger with the cloak, had been unfortunate enough to upset the two friends' plans.

CHAPTER LVI.

A JESUIT OF THE ELEVENTH YEAR.

In the first place, in order not to weary the reader's patience, we will hasten to answer the first question. The traveller with the cloak held over his face was Aramis, who after he had left Fouquet and had taken from a portmanteau which his servant had opened a cavalier's complete costume, had quitted the château, and had gone to the hotel of the Beau Paon, where by letter, seven or eight days previous, he had, as the landlord had stated, directed a room and an apartment to be retained for him.

Immediately after Malicorne and Manicamp had been turned out, Aramis approached the Franciscan, and asked him whether he would prefer the apartment or the room. The Franciscan inquired where they were both situated. He was told that the room was on the first floor, and the apartment on the second.

"The room, then," he said.

Aramis did not contradict him, but with great submissiveness said to the landlord, "The room;" and bowing with respect he withdrew into the apartment, and the Franciscan was accordingly carried at once into the room. Now, is it not extraordinary that this respect should be shown by a prelate of the church for a simple monk, — for one, too, belonging to a mendicant order, — to whom was thus given up, without a request for it even, a room which so many travellers were desirous of obtaining? How, too, was to be explained this unexpected arrival of

Aramis at the hotel of the Beau Paon, when he had entered the château with M. Fouquet, and could have remained at the château with M. Fouquet if he had liked?

The Franciscan supported his removal up the staircase without uttering a complaint, although it was evident that he suffered very much, and that every time the litter was knocked against the wall or against the railing of the staircase he experienced a terrible shock throughout his frame; and finally, when he had arrived in the room, he said to those who carried him, "Help me to place myself in that arm-chair." The bearers of the litter placed it on the ground, and lifting the sick man as gently as possible, carried him to the chair he had indicated, which was placed at the head of the bed. "Now," he added, with a marked benignity of gesture and tone, "desire the landlord to come up."

The men obeyed, and five minutes afterwards the landlord appeared at the door.

"My friend," said the Franciscan to him, "be kind enough to send these good fellows away; they are vassals of the Vicomte de Melun. They found me when, overcome by the heat, I had fainted on the road, and without thinking whether they would be paid for their trouble, they wished to carry me to their own homes. But I know at what cost to themselves is the hospitality which the poor extend to a sick man, and I preferred this hotel, where moreover I was expected."

The landlord looked at the Franciscan in amazement; but the latter with his thumb made the sign of the cross in a peculiar manner upon his breast. The host replied by making a similar sign on his left shoulder. "Yes, indeed," he said, "we did expect you, my father, but we hoped that you would arrive in a better state of health." As the peasants were looking with astonishment at the

innkeeper, usually so supercilious, and saw how respectful he had become all of a sudden in the presence of a poor monk, the Franciscan drew from a deep pocket two or three pieces of gold, which he held out.

"My friends," said he, "here is something to repay you for the care you have taken of me. So make yourselves perfectly easy, and do not be afraid of leaving me here. The order to which I belong, and for which I am travelling, does not wish me to beg; and as the attention you have shown me deserves to be rewarded, take these two louis and depart in peace."

The peasants did not dare to take them. The landlord took the two louis from the monk's hand, and placed them in that of one of the peasants, all four of whom withdrew, opening their eyes wider than ever. The door was then closed; and while the innkeeper stood respectfully near it, the Franciscan collected himself for a moment. He then passed across his sallow face a hand which seemed dried up by fever, and rubbed his nervous and trembling fingers across his grizzly beard. His large eyes, hollowed by sickness and anxiety, seemed to pursue in the vague distance a mournful and fixed idea.

"What physicians have you at Fontainebleau?" the Franciscan inquired, after a long pause.

"We have three, my father."

"What are their names?"

"Luiniguet, first."

"The next one?"

"A brother of the Carmelite order, named Brother Hubert."

"The next?"

"A secular member, named Grisart."

"Ah! Grisart?" murmured the monk. "Send for M. Grisart immediately."

The landlord moved in prompt obedience to the direction.

"Tell me, what priests are there near here?"

"What priests?"

"Yes, belonging to what orders?"

"There are Jesuits, Augustines, and Cordeliers; but the Jesuits are the nearest. Shall I send for a Jesuit confessor?"

"Yes, immediately."

The landlord went out.

It will be imagined that at the sign of the cross which they had exchanged the landlord and the invalid monk had recognized each other as two affiliated members of the formidable Society of Jesus. Left to himself, the Franciscan drew from his pocket a bundle of papers, some of which he read over with the most careful attention. The violence of his disorder, however, overcame his courage; his eyes rolled in their sockets, a cold sweat poured down his face, and he nearly fainted, and lay with his head thrown back and his arms hanging down on both sides of his chair. For more than five minutes he remained without any movement, when the landlord returned, bringing with him the physician, whom he had hardly allowed time to dress himself. The noise which they made in entering the room, the current of air which the opening of the door had occasioned, restored the sick man to his senses. He hurriedly seized hold of his scattered papers, and with his long and meagre hand concealed them under the cushions of the chair. The landlord went out of the room, leaving patient and physician together.

"Come here, M. Grisart," said the Franciscan to the doctor; "approach closer, for there is no time to be lost. Examine me, consider, and pronounce your sentence."

"The landlord," replied the physician, "told me that I had the honor of attending an affiliated brother."

"Yes," replied the Franciscan, "it is so. Tell me the truth, then. I feel very ill, and think that I am going to die."

The physician took the monk's hand and felt his pulse. "Oh!" he said, "a dangerous fever."

"What do you call a dangerous fever?" inquired the patient, with an imperious look.

"To an affiliated member of the first or second year," replied the physician, looking inquiringly at the monk, "I should say — a fever that may be cured."

"But to me?" said the Franciscan.

The physician hesitated.

"Look at my gray hair, and my forehead, full of anxious thought," he continued; "look at the lines in my face, by which I reckon up the trials I have undergone. I am a Jesuit of the eleventh year, M. Grisart."

The physician started; for, in fact, a Jesuit of the eleventh year was one of those men who had been initiated in all the secrets of the order, — one of those for whom the science has no more secrets, the society no further barriers to present, temporal obedience no more trammels.

"In that case," said Grisart, saluting him with respect, "I am in the presence of a master?"

"Yes; act, therefore, accordingly."

"And you wish to know — "

"My real state."

"Well," said the physician, "it is a brain fever, otherwise called acute meningitis, which has reached its highest degree of intensity."

"There is no hope, then?" asked the Franciscan, briefly.

"I do not say that," replied the doctor; "yet, considering the disordered state of the brain, the hurried respiration, the rapidity of the pulse, and the burning nature of the fever which is devouring you — "

"And which has thrice prostrated me since this morning," said the friar.

"Therefore I should call it a dangerous attack. But why did you not stop on the road?"

"I was expected here, and I was obliged to come."

"Even at the risk of your life?"

"Yes, at the risk of dying!"

"Very well; considering all the symptoms of your case, I must tell you that your condition is almost desperate."

The Franciscan smiled in a strange manner. "What you have just told me is perhaps sufficient for what is due to an affiliated member, even of the eleventh year; but for what is due to me, M. Grisart, it is too little, and I have a right to demand more. Come, then, let us be more candid still, and as frank as if we were making our confession to Heaven. Besides, I have already sent for a confessor."

"Oh! I hope, however," murmured the doctor.

"Answer me," said the sick man, displaying with a dignified gesture a golden ring, the stone of which had until that moment been turned inside, and which bore engraved thereon the distinguishing mark of the Society of Jesus.

Grisart uttered a loud exclamation. "The general!" he cried.

"Silence!" said the Franciscan; "you now understand that the truth is everything."

"Monseigneur, Monseigneur," murmured Grisart, "send for the confessor; for in two hours, at the next seizure, you will be attacked by delirium, and will pass away in the course of it."

"Very well," said the patient, for a moment contracting his eyebrows; "I have still two hours to live, then?"

"Yes; particularly if you take the potion I shall send you presently."

"And that will give me two hours more?"

"Two hours."

"I would take it, were it poison; for those two hours are necessary not only for myself, but for the glory of the order."

"What a loss, what a catastrophe for us all!" murmured the physician.

"It is the loss of one man, that is all," replied the Franciscan; "and Heaven will enable the poor monk who is about to leave you, to find a worthy successor. Adieu, M. Grisart; it is a boon from Heaven, indeed, that I have met you. A physician who had not been one of our holy congregation would have left me in ignorance of my condition; and relying on a few days more of existence, I should not have taken the necessary precautions. You are a learned man, M. Grisart, and that confers an honor upon us all; it would have been repugnant to my feelings to have found one of our order of little standing in his profession. Adieu, M. Grisart! send me the cordial immediately."

"Give me your blessing, at least, Monseigneur."

"In my mind I do; go, go!—in my mind I do so, I tell you,—*animo*, M. Grisart, *viribus impossibile;*" and he again fell back in the arm-chair, almost fainting again. M. Grisart hesitated whether he should give him immediate assistance, or should run to prepare the cordial he had promised. He doubtless decided in favor of the cordial, for he darted out of the room and disappeared down the staircase.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE STATE SECRET.

A FEW moments after Dr. Grisart's departure, the confessor arrived. He had hardly crossed the threshold of the door when the Franciscan fixed a penetrating look upon him, and shaking his head murmured, "A weak mind, I see; may Heaven forgive me for dying without the help of this living piece of human infirmity!" The confessor, on his side, regarded the dying man with astonishment, almost with terror. He had never beheld eyes so burningly bright at the very moment when they were about to close, nor looks so terrible when they were about to be quenched in death. The Franciscan made a rapid and imperious sign with his hand. "Sit down there, my father," he said, "and listen to me!" The Jesuit confessor — a good and simple priest, a recently initiated member of the order, who had seen only the beginning of its mysteries — yielded to the superiority assumed by the penitent.

"There are several persons staying in this hostelry," continued the Franciscan.

"But," inquired the Jesuit, "I thought that I had been summoned to receive confession. Is your remark, then, a confession?"

"Why do you ask me?"

"In order to know whether I am to keep your words secret."

"My remarks are part of my confession; I confide them to you in your character of a confessor."

"Very well," said the priest, installing himself in the chair which the Franciscan had with great difficulty just left in order to lie down on the bed.

The Franciscan continued: "I repeat, there are several persons staying in this inn."

"So I have heard."

"They ought to be eight in number."

The Jesuit made a sign that he understood him. "The first to whom I wish to speak," said the dying man, "is a German from Vienna, whose name is the Baron von Wostpur. Be kind enough to go and find him, and tell him that the person he expected has arrived."

The confessor, astounded, looked at his penitent; the confession seemed a singular one.

"Obey!" said the Franciscan, in a tone of command impossible to resist.

The good Jesuit, completely subdued, rose and left the room. As soon as he had gone, the Franciscan again took up the papers which a crisis of the fever had already once before obliged him to put aside. "The Baron von Wostpur? Good!" he said; "ambitious, a fool, and straitened in his means."

The monk folded up the papers, which he thrust under his pillow. Rapid footsteps were heard at the end of the corridor. The confessor returned, followed by the Baron von Wostpur, who walked along with his head raised, as though it were incumbent upon him to break through the ceiling with the feather in his hat. Therefore, upon seeing the Franciscan with his melancholy look, and the plainness of the room, he stopped and inquired, "Who summoned me?"

"I," said the Franciscan, who turned towards the con-

fessor, saying, "My good father, leave us for a moment together; when this gentleman leaves, you will return here."

The Jesuit left the room, and doubtless availed himself of this momentary absence from the chamber of the dying man to ask the host for some explanation about this strange penitent, who treated his confessor no better than he would a *valet de chambre*.

The baron approached the bed, and wished to speak; but the hand of the Franciscan imposed silence upon him. "Every moment is precious," said the latter, hurriedly. "You have come here for the competition, have you not?"

"Yes, my father."

"You hope to be elected general of the order?"

"I hope so."

"You know on what conditions alone you can possibly attain this high position, which makes one man the master of monarchs, the equal of popes?"

"Who are you," inquired the baron, "to subject me to these interrogatories?"

"I am he whom you expect."

"The elector-general?"

"I am the elected."

"You are —"

The Franciscan did not give him time to finish; he extended his shrunken hand, on which glittered the ring of the general of the order.

The baron drew back in surprise; and then immediately afterwards, bowing with the profoundest respect, he exclaimed, "Is it possible that you are here, Monseigneur? — you, in this wretched room; you, upon this miserable bed; you, in search of and selecting the future general, — that is, your own successor!"

"Do not distress yourself about that, Monsieur, but

fulfil immediately the principal condition, — that of furnishing the order with a secret of such importance that one of the greatest courts of Europe may be by your instrumentality forever bound to the order. Well, do you possess the secret which you promised in your request addressed to the Grand Council?"

"Monseigneur —"

"Let us proceed, however, in due order. You are the Baron von Wostpur?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"And this letter is from you?"

The general of the Jesuits drew a paper from his bundle, and presented it to the baron, who glanced at it, and made a sign in the affirmative, saying, "Yes, Monseigneur, this letter is mine."

"Can you show me the reply which the secretary of the Grand Council returned to you?"

"This is it, Monseigneur," said the baron, holding towards the Franciscan a letter bearing simply the address, "To his Excellency the Baron von Wostpur," and containing only this phrase, "From the 15th to the 22d of May, Fontainebleau, the hotel of the Beau-Paon. — A. M. D. G."[1]

"Right!" said the Franciscan; "here we are in presence. Speak!"

"I have a body of troops composed of fifty thousand men; all the officers are gained. I am encamped on the Danube. In four days I can overthrow the emperor, who is, as you are aware, opposed to the progress of our order, and can replace him by whichever of the princes of his family the order may determine upon."

The Franciscan listened unmoved. "Is that all?" he said.

[1] Ad majorem Dei gloriam.

"A revolution throughout Europe is included in my plan," said the baron.

"Very well, M. de Wostpur, you will receive a reply; return to your room, and leave Fontainebleau within a quarter of an hour."

The baron withdrew backwards, just as obsequiously as if he were taking leave of the emperor whom he was ready to betray.

"There is no secret there," murmured the Franciscan, "it is a plot. Besides," he added, after a moment's reflection, "the future of Europe is no longer in the House of Austria;" and with a red pencil which he held in his hand he struck the Baron von Wostpur's name from the list. "Now for the cardinal," he said; "we ought to get something more serious on the part of Spain." Raising his eyes, he perceived the confessor, who was awaiting his orders as submissively as a school-boy. "Ah!" he said, noticing his submissive air, "you have been talking with the landlord."

"Yes, Monseigneur; and to the physician."

"To Grisart?"

"Yes."

"He is here, then?"

"He is waiting with the potion he promised."

"Very well; if I require him, I will call. You now understand the great importance of my confession, do you not?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"Then go and fetch me the Spanish Cardinal Herrebia. Make haste! Only, as you now understand the matter in hand, you will remain near me, for I begin to feel faint."

"Shall I summon the physician?"

"Not yet, not yet — the Spanish Cardinal — no one else. Fly!"

Five minutes afterwards the cardinal, pale and disturbed, entered the little room.

"I am informed, Monseigneur — " stammered the cardinal.

"To the point," said the Franciscan in a faint voice, showing the cardinal a letter which he had written to the Grand Council. "Is that your handwriting?" he asked.

"Yes, but — "

"And your summons here?"

The cardinal hesitated to answer. His purple revolted against the mean garb of the poor Franciscan. The dying man stretched out his hand and displayed the ring, which produced its effect, greater in proportion to the elevation of the person over whom the Franciscan exercised his influence.

"Quick! the secret, the secret!" demanded the dying man, leaning upon his confessor.

"*Coram isti?*" inquired the Spanish cardinal.

"Speak in Spanish," said the Franciscan, showing the most eager attention.

"You are aware, Monseigneur," said the cardinal, continuing the conversation in the Castilian dialect, "that the condition of the marriage of the Infanta with the King of France is the absolute renunciation of the rights of the said Infanta, as well as of King Louis XIV., to all claim to the crown of Spain." The Franciscan made a sign in the affirmative. "The consequence is," continued the cardinal, "that the peace and alliance between the two kingdoms depend upon the observance of that clause of the contract." A similar sign from the Franciscan. "Not only France and Spain," said the cardinal, "but the whole of Europe even, would be violently rent asunder by the faithlessness of either party." Another movement of the sick man's head. "It further results," continued

the speaker, "that the man who might be able to foresee events, and to render certain that which is no more than a vague idea floating in the mind of man, — that is to say, the idea of future good or evil, — would preserve the world from a great catastrophe; and the divining of future events in the very brain of him who prepares them could be turned to the advantage of our order."

"*Pronto, pronto!*" murmured the Franciscan, who suddenly became paler, and leaned upon the priest.

The cardinal approached the ear of the dying man, and said: "Well, Monseigneur, I know that the King of France has determined that at the first pretext — a death for instance, either that of the King of Spain or that of a brother of the Infanta — France will, arms in hand, claim the inheritance; and I have in my possession, already prepared, the plan of policy agreed upon by Louis XIV. for that emergency."

"And this plan?" said the Franciscan.

"Here it is," returned the cardinal.

"In whose handwriting is it?"

"In my own."

"Have you anything further to say?"

"I think that I have said a good deal, Monseigneur," replied the cardinal.

"Yes, you have rendered the order a great service. But how did you procure the details by the aid of which you have constructed your plan?"

"I have the under servants of the King of France in my pay, and I obtain from them all the waste papers, which have been saved from being burned."

"Very ingenious," murmured the Franciscan, endeavoring to smile. "Monsieur the Cardinal, you will leave this hotel in a quarter of an hour, and a reply shall be sent you. Go!"

The cardinal withdrew.

"Call Grisart, and go and bring me the Venetian Marini," said the sick man.

While the confessor obeyed, the Franciscan, instead of striking out the cardinal's name, as he had done the baron's, made a cross at the side of it. Then, exhausted by the effort, he fell back on his bed, murmuring the name of Dr. Grisart. When he returned to his senses, he had drunk about half of the potion, of which the remainder was left in the glass, and he found himself supported by the physician, while the Venetian and the confessor were standing close to the door. The Venetian submitted to the same formalities as his two competitors, and hesitated as they had done at the sight of the two strangers; but, his confidence restored by the order of the general, he revealed that the Pope, terrified at the power of the order, was weaving a plot for the general expulsion of the Jesuits, and was tampering with the different courts of Europe, with the purpose of obtaining their assistance. He described the pontiff's auxiliaries, his means of action, and indicated the particular locality in the Archipelago whither, by a sudden surprise, two cardinals — adepts of the eleventh year, and consequently high in authority — were to be transported, together with thirty-two of the principal affiliated members at Rome.

The Franciscan thanked the Signor Marini. It was by no means a slight service he had rendered the society by denouncing this pontifical project. The Venetian thereupon received directions to depart in a quarter of an hour, and left as radiant as if he already possessed the ring, the sign of the supreme authority of the society. As he was going away, however, the Franciscan murmured on his bed: "All these men are either spies or a sort of police; not one of them is a general. They have all dis-

closed a plot, but not one of them a secret. It is not by means of ruin or war or force that the Society of Jesus is to be governed, but by that mysterious influence which moral superiority confers. No, the man is not yet found; and to complete the misfortune, Heaven strikes me down, and I am dying. Oh! must the society indeed fall with me for want of a column to support it? Must death, which is waiting for me, swallow up with me the future of the order, — that future which ten years more of my own life would have rendered eternal? For that future, with the reign of the new king, is opening radiant and full of splendor."

These words, partly of meditation, partly uttered aloud, were listened to by the Jesuit confessor with a terror similar to that with which one listens to the wanderings of a person attacked by fever; while Grisart, with a mind of a higher order, drank them in as the revelations of an unknown world, which his eyes could see, but which his hand could not reach.

Suddenly the Franciscan roused himself. "Let us finish this," he said; "death is approaching. Oh! just now I was dying resignedly, for I hoped — while now I sink in despair, unless those who remain — Grisart, Grisart, make me live an hour longer!"

Grisart approached the dying monk, and made him swallow a few drops, not of the potion which was still left in the glass, but of the contents of a flask he had upon his person.

"Call the Scotchman!" exclaimed the Franciscan; "call the Bremen merchant! Call, call quickly! I am dying; I am suffocated."

The confessor darted forward to seek for assistance, — as if there had been any human strength which could hold back the hand of death, which lay heavily upon the sick

man; but at the threshold of the door he found Aramis, who with his finger on his lips, like the statue of Harpocrates, the god of silence, by a look motioned him back to the farther end of the apartment. The physician and the confessor, after having consulted each other by their looks, made a movement as if to keep Aramis back, who, however, with two signs of the cross, each made in a different manner, transfixed them both in their places.

"A chief!" they both murmured.

Aramis slowly advanced into the room where the dying man was struggling against the first attack of the death agony. Whether through the effect of the elixir, or because the appearance of Aramis had restored his strength, he made a movement, and with his eyes glaring, his mouth half open, and his hair damp with sweat, sat up on the bed. Aramis felt that the air of the room was stifling. All the windows were closed; the fire was burning upon the hearth; a pair of candles of yellow wax were guttering down in the copper candlesticks, and by their thick smoke still further heated the atmosphere of the room. He opened the window, and fixing upon the dying man a look full of intelligence and respect said to him: "Monseigneur, pray forgive my coming in this manner, before you summoned me; but your state alarms me, and I thought that you might possibly die before you had seen me, for I am the sixth on your list."

The dying man started and looked at the list.

"You are, then, he who was formerly called Aramis, and since the Chevalier d'Herblay? You are the Bishop of Vannes, then?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"I know you, I have seen you."

"At the last jubilee we were with the Holy Father together."

"Yes, yes, I remember; and you place yourself on the list of candidates?"

"Monseigneur, I have heard it said that the order required to become possessed of a great State secret; and knowing that from modesty you had in anticipation resigned your functions in favor of the person who should produce this secret, I wrote to say that I was ready to compete, possessing alone a secret which I believe to be important."

"Speak!" said the Franciscan; "I am ready to listen to you, and to judge of the importance of the secret."

"Monseigneur, a secret of the value of that which I have the honor to confide to you cannot be communicated by speech. Any idea which has once escaped from the limbo of thought and become vulgarized by any manifestation or communication of it whatever, no longer is the property of him who gave it birth. My words may be overheard by some inquisitive and hostile ear; one ought not, therefore, to speak at random, for in such a case the secret would cease to be one."

"How do you propose, then, to convey your secret?" inquired the dying monk.

With one hand Aramis signed to the physician and the confessor to withdraw, and with the other he handed to the Franciscan a paper enclosed in a double envelope.

"Is not writing more dangerous still than language?" asked the Franciscan.

"No, Monseigneur," said Aramis, "for you will find within this envelope characters which you and I alone can understand." The Franciscan looked at Aramis, with an astonishment which momentarily increased. "It is a cipher," continued the latter, "which you used in 1655, and which your secretary, Juan Jujan, who is dead, alone could decipher, if he were to be restored to life."

"You knew this cipher, then?"

"It was I who taught it to him," said Aramis, bowing with graceful respect, and advancing towards the door as if to leave the room; but a gesture of the Franciscan, accompanied by a cry for him to remain, detained him.

"*Jésus!*" cried the dying man; "*ecce homo!*" Then reading the paper a second time, he called out, "Approach, approach quickly!"

Aramis returned to the side of the Franciscan, with the same calm countenance and the same respectful manner. The Franciscan, extending his arm, burned by the flame of the candle the paper which Aramis had handed him. Then taking hold of Aramis's hand, he drew him towards him, and inquired, "In what manner and by whose means could you possibly have become acquainted with such a secret?"

"Through Madame de Chevreuse, the intimate friend and confidante of the queen."

"And Madame de Chevreuse?"

"Is dead."

"Did any others know it?"

"A man and woman only, and they of the lower classes."

"Who were they?"

"Persons who had brought him up."

"What has become of them?"

"Dead also. This secret burns like fire."

"And you have survived?"

"No one is aware that I know it."

"And for what length of time have you possessed this secret?"

"For the last fifteen years."

"And you have kept it?"

"I wished to live."

"And you give it to the order without ambition, without requital?"

"I give it to the order with ambition and with a hope of return," said Aramis; "for if you live, Monseigneur, you will make of me, now that you know me, what I can and ought to be."

"And as I am dying," exclaimed the Franciscan, "I constitute you my successor. Take this!" and drawing off the ring, he slipped it on Aramis's finger. Then turning towards the two spectators of this scene, he said: "Be ye witnesses of this, and testify, if need be, that, sick in body but sound in mind, I have freely and voluntarily bestowed this ring, the token of supreme authority, upon Monseigneur d'Herblay, Bishop of Vannes, whom I nominate my successor, and before whom I, an humble sinner, about to appear before my Maker, prostrate myself the first, as an example for all to follow;" and the Franciscan bowed lowly and submissively, while the physician and the Jesuit fell on their knees. Aramis, while he became paler than the dying man himself, bent his looks successively upon all the participants in this scene. Gratified ambition flowed with his blood to his heart.

"We must lose no time," said the Franciscan; "what I had to do here oppresses me, devours me! I shall never accomplish it."

"I will do it," said Aramis.

"That is well," said the Franciscan; and then turning towards the Jesuit and the physician, he added, "Leave us alone." They both obeyed. "With this sign," he said, "you are the man needed to shake the world; with this sign you will cast down; with this sign you will build up, — *in hoc signo vinces!* Close the door," he continued. Aramis shut and bolted the door, and returned

to the side of the Franciscan. "The Pope has conspired against the order," said the monk; "the Pope must die."

"He shall die," said Aramis, quietly.

"Seven hundred thousand livres are owing to a Bremen merchant of the name of Donstett, who came here to get the guarantee of my signature."

"He shall be paid," said Aramis.

"Six knights of Malta, whose names are written here, have discovered, by the indiscreetness of one of the affiliated of the eleventh year, the third mysteries; it must be ascertained what these men have done with the secret, to get it back again and suppress it."

"It shall be done."

"Three dangerous affiliated members must be sent away into Thibet, to perish there; they are condemned. Here are their names."

"I will see that the sentence be carried out."

"Lastly, there is a lady at Anvers, grand-niece of Ravaillac; she holds certain papers in her hands which compromise the order. There has been payable to the family during the last fifty-one years a pension of fifty thousand livres. The pension is a heavy one, and the order is not wealthy. Redeem the papers for a sum of money paid down, or in case of refusal stop the pension — but without risk."

"I will consider the matter," said Aramis.

"A vessel coming from Lima should have entered the port of Lisbon last week; ostensibly it is laden with chocolate, in reality with gold. Every ingot is concealed by a coating of chocolate. The vessel belongs to the order; it is worth seventeen million livres. You will see that claim is laid to it; here are the bills of lading."

"To what port shall I direct it to be taken?"

"To Bayonne."

"Before three weeks are over it shall be there, wind and weather permitting. Is that all?"

The Franciscan made a sign in the affirmative, for he could no longer speak. The blood rushed to his throat and his head, and gushed from his mouth, his nostrils, and his eyes. The dying man had barely time to press Aramis's hand, when he fell from his bed in convulsions upon the floor.

Aramis placed his hand on the Franciscan's heart, but it had ceased to beat. As he stooped down, he observed that a fragment of the paper which he had given to the Franciscan had escaped being burned. He picked it up and burned it to the last atom. Then, summoning the confessor and the physician, he said to the former: "Your penitent is in heaven; he needs nothing more than prayers and the burial bestowed on the dead. Go and prepare what is necessary for a simple interment, such as a poor monk only would require. Go!" The Jesuit left the room. Then, turning towards the physician, and observing his pale and anxious face, he said, in a low tone of voice, "M. Grisart, empty and clean this glass; there is left in it too much of what the Grand Council desired you to put into it." Grisart, amazed, overcome, completely astounded, almost fell backwards in his extreme terror. Aramis shrugged his shoulders in sign of pity, took the glass, and poured out the contents among the ashes of the hearth. He then left the room, carrying the papers of the dead man with him.

CHAPTER LVIII.

MISSION.

THE next day, or rather the same day (for the events we have just described had been concluded only at three o'clock in the morning), before breakfast was served, and as the king was preparing to go to Mass with the two queens; as Monsieur, with the Chevalier de Lorraine and a few other intimate companions, was mounting his horse to set off for the river, to take one of those famous baths for which the ladies of the court were almost wild; when, in fact, no one remained in the château with the exception of Madame, who under the pretext of indisposition would not leave her room, — Montalais was seen, or rather was not seen, to glide stealthily out of the room appropriated to the maids of honor, leading La Vallière after her, who tried to conceal herself as much as possible; and both of them, hurrying secretly through the gardens, succeeded, looking round them at every step they took, in reaching the thicket.

The weather was cloudy; a hot wind bowed the flowers and the shrubs; the burning dust, caught up from the roads, was whirled in eddies towards the trees. Montalais, who during their progress had discharged the functions of a clever scout, advanced a few steps farther, and turning round again, to be quite sure that no one was either listening or approaching, said to her companion, "Thank goodness, we are quite alone! Since yesterday every one spies us here, and a circle seems to be drawn round us, as if we were plague-stricken." La

Vallière bent down her head and sighed. "It is positively unheard of!" continued Montalais; "from M. Malicorne to M. de Saint-Aignan, every one wishes to get hold of our secret. Come, Louise, let us confer together a little, in order that I may know what plan of action to pursue."

La Vallière lifted upon her companion her beautiful eyes, pure and deep as the azure of a summer sky. "And I," she said, — "I will ask you, why have we been summoned to Madame's own apartment? Why have we slept there, instead of sleeping, as usual, in our own? Why did you return so late, and whence are these measures of strict supervision which have been adopted since this morning with respect to us?"

"My dear Louise, you answer my question by another, or rather by ten others, — which is not answering me at all. I will tell you all that later; and as they are matters of secondary importance, you can wait. What I ask you — for everything will depend upon that — is, whether there is or is not any secret."

"I do not know that there is any secret," said La Vallière; "but I do know, for my own part at least, that there has been great imprudence committed. Since the foolish remark I made, and my still more silly fainting yesterday, every one here is making remarks about us."

"Speak for yourself, my dear," said Montalais, laughing, — "speak for yourself and for Tonnay-Charente; for both of you made your declarations of love to the skies yesterday, and unfortunately they were intercepted."

La Vallière hung down her head. "Really, you overwhelm me," she said.

"I?"

"Yes; you are killing me with your jests."

"Listen to me, Louise! These are no jests; on the

contrary, nothing is more serious. I did not drag you out of the château, I did not miss attending Mass, I did not pretend to have a headache, — as Madame did, and which she has as much as I have, — and lastly I did not display ten times more diplomacy than M. Colbert inherited from M. de Mazarin and makes use of with respect to M. Fouquet, in order to find means of confiding my perplexities to you, for the sole end and purpose that when at last we are alone and no one can listen to us, you are to continue to deal hypocritically with me. No, no! believe me that when I ask you any questions it is not from curiosity alone, but really because the position is a critical one. What you said yesterday is now known; it is a text on which every one is discoursing. Every one embellishes it to the utmost, according to his own fancy. You had the honor last night, and you have it still to-day, of occupying the whole court, my dear; and the number of tender and witty remarks which have been ascribed to you would make Mademoiselle de Scudéry and her brother burst from very spite if they were faithfully reported to them."

"But, dearest Montalais," said the poor girl, "you know better than any one what I did say, since you were present when I said it."

"Yes, I know; but that is not the question. I have not even forgotten a single syllable you said; but did you think the thing you said?"

Louise became confused. "What!" she exclaimed, "more questions still? Oh, heavens! when I would give the whole world to forget what I did say, how does it happen that every one does his utmost to remind me of it? Oh, this is indeed terrible!"

"What is?"

"To have a friend who ought to spare me, who might

advise me and help me to save myself, and yet who is destroying — is killing me."

"There, there, that will do!" said Montalais; "after having said too little, you now say too much. No one thinks of killing you, nor even of robbing you, even of your secret. I wish to have it voluntarily, and in no other way, — for the question does not concern your own affairs only, but ours also; and Tonnay-Charente would tell you as I do, if she were here. For the fact is that last evening she wished to have some private conversation in our room; and I was going there after the Manicampian and Malicornian colloquies had terminated, when I learned on my return — rather late, it is true — that Madame had sequestered her maids of honor, and that we are to sleep in her apartments instead of our own rooms. Moreover, Madame has sequestered her maids of honor in order that they should not have the time to concert any measures together; and this morning she was closeted with Tonnay-Charente with the same object. Tell me, then, dear friend, to what extent Athenaïs and I can rely upon you, as we will tell you in what way you can rely upon us."

"I do not clearly understand the question you have put," said Louise, much agitated.

"Hum! and yet, on the contrary, you seem to understand me very well. However, I will put my questions in a more precise manner, in order that you may not be able in the slightest degree to evade them. Listen to me! *Do you love M. de Bragelonne?* That is plain enough, is it not?"

At this question, which fell like the first projectile of a besieging army into a besieged town, Louise started. "You ask me," she exclaimed, "if I love Raoul, the friend of my childhood, — my brother, almost!"

"No, no, no! Again you evade me, — or you wish to evade me. I do not ask you if you love Raoul, your childhood's friend, your brother; but I ask if you love M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne, your affianced husband."

"Good heavens, my dear Montalais!" said Louise; "how severe your tone is!"

"You deserve no indulgence. I am neither more nor less severe than usual. I put a question to you; so answer it!"

"You certainly do not," said Louise, in a choking voice, "speak to me like a friend; but I will answer you as a true friend."

"Well, do so."

"Very well; my heart is full of scruples and silly feelings of pride with respect to everything that a woman ought to keep secret, and in this respect no one has ever read my inmost heart."

"That I know very well. If I had read it, I should not ask you questions; I should simply say: 'My good Louise, you have the happiness of an acquaintance with M. de Bragelonne, who is an excellent young man, and an advantageous match for a girl without any fortune. M. de la Fère will leave something like fifteen thousand livres a year to his son. At a future day, then, you, as this son's wife, will have fifteen thousand livres a year, — which is not bad. Turn, then, neither to the right hand nor to the left, but go frankly to M. de Bragelonne, — that is to say, to the altar to which he will lead you. Afterwards, — why, afterwards, according to his disposition, you will be emancipated or enslaved; in other words, you will have a right to commit any piece of folly which people commit who have either too much liberty or too little.' That is, my dear Louise, what I should have told you at first, if I had been able to read your heart."

"And I should have thanked you," stammered Louise, "although the advice does not appear to me to be altogether good."

"Wait, wait! But immediately after having given you that advice, I should add: 'Louise, it is dangerous to pass whole days with your head reclining on your bosom, your hands unoccupied, your eyes wandering; it is dangerous to prefer the least-frequented paths, and no longer to be amused with such diversions as gladden young girls' hearts; it is dangerous, Louise, to write with the point of your foot, as you are doing upon the gravel, certain letters which it is useless for you to efface, but which appear again under your heel, particularly when those letters rather resemble the letter L than the letter B; and lastly, it is dangerous to allow the mind to dwell on a thousand wild fancies, the fruits of solitude and headaches. These fancies, while they sink into a young girl's mind, make her cheeks sink in also; so that it is not unusual under such circumstances to find the most delightful persons in the world becoming the most disagreeable, and the wittiest becoming the dullest.'"

"I thank you, my dearest Aure," replied La Vallière, gently; "it is like you to speak to me in this manner, and I thank you for it."

"It was only for the benefit of wild dreamers, such as I described, that I spoke; do not take any of my words, then, to yourself except such as you think you deserve. Stay! I hardly know what story recurs to my memory of some silly or melancholy young girl, — for M. Dangeau explained to me the other day that *mélancolie* should be grammatically written *mélancholie*, with an *h*, because the French word is formed of two Greek words, of which one means *black* and the other *bile*. I return, then, to that young woman who was dying of *black bile* because

she fancied that the prince or the king or the emperor, whoever it was, — and it does not much matter which, — had fallen completely in love with her; while, on the contrary, the prince or the king or the emperor, whichever you please, was plainly in love with some one else, and (a singular circumstance, — one, indeed, which she could not perceive, although every one around and about her perceived it clearly enough) made use of her as a screen for his own love-affair. You laugh, as I do, at this poor silly girl, do you not, La Vallière?"

"I laugh, of course," stammered Louise, pale as death.

"And you are right, too, for the thing is amusing enough. The story, whether true or false, amused me; and so I have remembered it and told it to you. Just imagine, then, my good Louise, the mischief that such a melancholy would create in your brain, — a melancholy, I mean, with an *h*. For my own part I resolved to tell you the story; for if such a thing were to happen to one of us, she ought to be well assured of this truth: to-day it is a snare; to-morrow it will become a jest and mockery; the next day it will be death itself." La Vallière started again, and became, if possible, still paler. "Whenever a king takes notice of us," continued Montalais, "he lets us see it easily enough; and if we happen to be the object he covets, he knows very well how to gain his object. You see, then, Louise, that in such circumstances, between young girls exposed to such a danger, the most perfect confidence should exist, in order that those hearts which are not disposed towards melancholy may watch over those which are likely to become so."

"Silence, silence!" exclaimed La Vallière; "some one is approaching."

"Some one is indeed approaching," said Montalais;

"but who can it be? Everybody is away, either at Mass with the king or bathing with Monsieur."

At the end of the walk the young girls perceived almost immediately, beneath the arching trees, the graceful carriage and noble height of a young man, who with his sword under his arm and a cloak thrown across his shoulders, and booted and spurred besides, saluted them from the distance with a charming smile.

"Raoul!" exclaimed Montalais.

"M. de Bragelonne!" murmured Louise.

"A very proper judge to decide upon our difference of opinion," said Montalais.

"Oh, Montalais, Montalais, for pity's sake," exclaimed La Vallière, "after having been so cruel, show me a little mercy!"

These words, uttered with all the fervor of a prayer, effaced all trace of irony from Montalais's face, if not from her heart also. "Why, you are as handsome as Amadis, M. de Bragelonne," she cried to Raoul, "and armed and booted like him!"

"A thousand compliments, Mesdemoiselles," replied Raoul, bowing.

"But why, I ask, are you booted in this manner?" repeated Montalais; while La Vallière, although she looked at Raoul with a surprise equal to that of her companion, nevertheless uttered not a word.

"Why?" inquired Raoul.

"Yes," ventured La Vallière, in turn.

"Because I am going away," said Bragelonne, looking at Louise.

The young girl felt herself smitten by some superstitious feeling of terror, and tottered. "You are going away, Raoul!" she cried; "and where are you going?"

"Dearest Louise," replied the young man, with that

quiet, composed manner which was natural to him, "I am going to England."

"What are you going to do in England?"

"The king has sent me there."

"The king!" exclaimed Louise and Aure together, involuntarily exchanging glances, the conversation which had just been interrupted recurring to them both.

Raoul intercepted the glance, but he could not understand its meaning, and, naturally enough, attributed it to the interest which both the young girls took in him. "His Majesty," he said, "has been good enough to remember that M. le Comte de la Fère is high in favor with King Charles II. This morning, then, as he was on his way to attend Mass, the king, seeing me as he passed, signed to me to approach, which I accordingly did. 'M. de Bragelonne,' he said to me, 'you will call upon M. Fouquet, who has received from me letters for the King of Great Britain; you will be the bearer of those letters.' I bowed. 'Ah!' his Majesty added, 'before you leave, you will be good enough to take any commissions which Madame may have for the king her brother.'"

"Gracious Heaven!" murmured Louise, much agitated, and yet full of thought at the same time.

"So quickly! You are desired to set off in such haste!" said Montalais, almost paralyzed by this unforeseen event.

"Properly to obey those whom we respect," said Raoul, "it is necessary to obey quickly. Within ten minutes after I had received the order, I was ready. Madame, already informed, is writing the letter which she is so kind as to do me the honor of intrusting to me. In the mean time, learning from Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente that it was likely you would be in the direction of the grove, I came here, and am happy to find you both."

"And both of us in great suffering, as you see," said

Montalais, coming to Louise's assistance, whose countenance was visibly altered.

"Suffering?" repeated Raoul, pressing Louise de la Vallière's hand with a tender curiosity. "Why, really, your hand is like ice."

"It is nothing."

"This coldness does not reach your heart, Louise, does it?" inquired the young man, with a tender smile.

Louise raised her head hastily, as if this question had been inspired by some suspicion, and had aroused a feeling of remorse. "Oh, you know," she said with an effort, "that my heart will never be cold towards a friend like yourself, M. de Bragelonne."

"Thank you, Louise. I know both your heart and your mind, and it is not by the touch of the hand that one can judge of an affection like yours. You know, Louise, how devotedly I love you, with what perfect and unreserved confidence I have resigned my life to you; will you not forgive me, then, for speaking to you with something like the frankness of a child?"

"Speak, M. Raoul," said Louise, trembling very much; "I am listening."

"I cannot part from you carrying away with me a thought which torments me. Absurd I know it to be, and yet it is one which rends my very heart."

"Are you going away, then, for any length of time?" inquired La Vallière, with a thickened utterance, while Montalais turned her head aside.

"No; and probably I shall not be absent more than a fortnight." La Vallière pressed her hand upon her heart, which felt as though it were breaking. "It is strange," pursued Raoul, looking at the young girl with a melancholy expression. "I have often left you when setting off on adventures fraught with danger. Then I started joy-

ously enough, — my heart free, my mind intoxicated by the thought of happiness to come, of hopes for the future; and yet at that time I was about to face the Spanish cannon or the cruel halberds of the Walloons. To-day, without the existence of any danger or uneasiness and by the easiest manner in the world, I am going in search of a glorious recompense, which this mark of the king's favor promises me; for I am, perhaps, going to win you, Louise. What other favor, more precious than yourself, could the king confer upon me? Yet, Louise, in very truth, I know not how or why, but all this happiness and all this future seem to vanish from my eyes like smoke, like an idle dream; and I feel here, here at the very bottom of my heart, a deep-seated grief, a dejection which I cannot express in words, — something heavy, torpid, death-like. Oh, Louise, too well do I know why; it is because I have never loved you so truly as now. Oh, my God! my God!"

At this last exclamation, which issued as it were from a broken heart, Louise burst into tears, and threw herself into Montalais's arms. The latter, although she was not very easily moved with emotion, felt the tears rush to her eyes and her heart compressed as though in a vice. Raoul saw only the tears of his betrothed; his look, however, did not penetrate — nay, sought not to penetrate — beyond those tears. He bent his knee before her, and tenderly kissed her hand; and it was evident that in that kiss he poured out his whole heart before her.

"Rise, rise," said Montalais to him, herself ready to cry; "for here is Athenaïs coming."

Raoul rose, brushed his knee with the back of his hand, smiled again upon Louise, whose eyes were fixed on the ground, and having pressed Montalais's hand gratefully, turned to salute Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, the

sound of whose silken robe was already heard upon the gravel-walk. "Has Madame finished her letter?" he inquired, when the young girl came within reach of his voice.

"Yes, Monsieur the Viscount, the letter is finished, sealed, and her royal Highness awaits you."

Raoul at this remark hardly gave himself time to salute Athenaïs, cast one last look at Louise, bowed to Montalais, and withdrew in the direction of the château. As he withdrew he again turned round; but at last, at the end of the grand walk, it was useless to do so again, as he could no longer see them. The three young girls on their side had with very different feelings watched him till he disappeared.

"At last," said Athenaïs, the first to break the silence,—"at last we are alone, free to talk of yesterday's great affair, and to come to an understanding upon the conduct it is advisable for us to pursue. Besides, if you will listen to me," she continued, looking round on all sides, "I will explain to you as briefly as possible, in the first place, our own duty, such as I understand it, and, if you do not understand a hint, what is Madame's desire on the subject."

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente pronounced these words in such a tone as to leave no doubt, in her companions' minds, of the official character with which she was invested.

"Madame's desire!" exclaimed Montalais and Louise, together.

"Her *ultimatum*," replied Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, diplomatically.

"But, good heavens! Mademoiselle," murmured La Vallière, "does Madame know, then—"

"Madame knows more about the matter than we said

even," said Athenaïs, in a formal, precise manner; "therefore, Mesdemoiselles, let us come to a proper understanding."

"Yes, indeed," said Montalais; "and I am listening in breathless attention. Speak, Athenaïs!"

"Gracious Heaven!" murmured Louise, trembling, "shall I ever recover from that cruel evening?"

"Oh, do not frighten yourself in that manner!" said Athenaïs; "we have found a remedy for it." So, seating herself between her two companions, and taking each of them by the hand, which she held in her own, she began. The first words were hardly spoken, when they heard a horse galloping away over the stones of the public high-road, outside the gates of the château.

CHAPTER LIX.

HAPPY AS A PRINCE.

At the very moment when he was about entering the château, Bragelonne had met De Guiche. But before having been met by Raoul, De Guiche had met Manicamp, who had met Malicorne. How was it that Malicorne had met Manicamp? Nothing more simple, for he had awaited his return from Mass, where he had accompanied M. de Saint-Aignan. When they met, they had congratulated each other upon their good fortune, and Manicamp had availed himself of the circumstance to ask his friend if he had not a few crowns still remaining at the bottom of his pocket. The latter, without expressing any surprise at the question, which he perhaps expected, had answered that a pocket on which one is drawing continually without ever putting anything into it resembles those wells which can supply water during the winter, but which the gardeners exhaust during the summer; that his (Malicorne's) pocket certainly was deep, and that there would be a pleasure in drawing on it in times of plenty, but that unhappily abuse had produced barrenness.

To this remark Manicamp, deep in thought, had replied, "Quite true!"

"The question, then, is how to fill it?" Malicorne had added.

"Of course; but in what way?"

"Nothing easier, my dear M. Manicamp."

"Good! How?"

"A post in Monsieur's household, and the pocket is full again."

"You have the post?"

"That is, I have the promise of being nominated."

"Well?"

"Yes; but the promise of nomination, without the post itself, is the purse without money."

"Quite true," Manicamp had replied a second time.

"Let us try for the post, then," the candidate had persisted.

"My dear fellow," sighed Manicamp, "an appointment in Monsieur's household is one of the gravest difficulties of our position."

"Oh! oh!"

"There is no question that at the present moment we cannot ask Monsieur for anything."

"Why so?"

"Because we are not on good terms with him."

"Absurd!" said Malicorne, flatly.

"Bah! and if we were to show Madame any attention," said Manicamp, "frankly speaking, do you think we should please Monsieur?"

"Precisely; if we show Madame any attention, and do so adroitly, Monsieur ought to adore us."

"Hum!"

"Either that, or we are great fools; make haste, therefore, M. Manicamp, you who are so able a politician, to reconcile M. de Guiche to his royal Highness."

"What did M. de Saint-Aignan tell you, Malicorne?"

"Tell me? Nothing; he asked me several questions, and that was all."

"Well, he was less discreet with me."

"What did he tell you?"

"That the king is passionately in love with Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"We knew that already," replied Malicorne, ironically, "and everybody talks about it loudly enough for every one to know it; but in the mean time pray do what I advise you. Speak to M. de Guiche, and endeavor to get him to make an advance towards Monsieur. Deuce take it! he owes his royal Highness that, at least."

"But we must see De Guiche, then?"

"There does not seem to be any great difficulty in that. Try to see him in the same way in which I tried to see you; wait for him, — you know that he is naturally very fond of walking."

"Yes; but where does he walk?"

"What a question to ask! Do you not know that he is in love with Madame?"

"So it is said."

"Very well; you will find him walking about on the side of the château where her apartments are."

"Stay, my dear Malicorne! you were not mistaken, for here he comes."

"Why should I be mistaken? Have you ever noticed that I am in the habit of making mistakes? Come! we only need to understand each other. Are you in want of money?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Manicamp, mournfully.

"Well, I want my appointment. Let Malicorne have the appointment, and Manicamp shall have the money; it is not more difficult than that."

"Very well. In that case make yourself easy; I will do my best."

"Do so."

De Guiche approached. Malicorne stepped aside; and Manicamp caught hold of De Guiche, who was thought-

ful and melancholy. "Tell me, my dear count, what rhyme you were trying to find," said Manicamp. "I have an excellent one to match yours, — particularly if yours ends in *âme*."

De Guiche shook his head, and recognizing a friend, took him by the arm. "My dear Manicamp," he said, "I am in search of something very different from a rhyme."

"What is it for which you are looking?"

"You will help me to find what I am in search of," continued the count, — "you, who are such an idle fellow; in other words, a man with a mind full of ingenious devices."

"I am getting my ingenuity ready, then, my dear count."

"This is the state of the case, then: I wish to approach a particular house, where I have business."

"You must get near the house, then," said Manicamp.

"Very good; but in this house dwells a husband who happens to be jealous."

"Is he more jealous than the dog Cerberus?"

"Not more, but quite as much so."

"Has he three mouths, like that obdurate guardian of the infernal regions? Do not shrug your shoulders, my dear count! I put the question to you with a perfect reason for doing so, since poets pretend that in order to soften M. Cerberus the visitor must take something enticing with him, — a cake, for instance. Therefore I, who view the matter in a prosaic light, — that is to say, the light of reality, — I say, one cake is very little for three mouths. If your jealous husband has three mouths, Count, get three cakes."

"Manicamp, I can get such advice as that from M. Beautru."

"In order to get better advice, Monsieur the Count," said Manicamp, with comical seriousness, "you will be

obliged to adopt a more precise formula than that which you have used towards me."

"If Raoul were here," said De Guiche, "he would be sure to understand me."

"So I think, — particularly if you said to him, 'I should very much like to see *Madame* a little nearer; but I fear *Monsieur*, who is jealous.'"

"Manicamp!" cried the count, angrily, and endeavoring by a look to overwhelm his tormentor, who did not, however, appear to be in the slightest degree disturbed by it.

"What is the matter now, my dear count?" inquired Manicamp.

"What! is it thus that you blaspheme the most sacred of names?" cried De Guiche.

"What names?"

"Monsieur! Madame! — the highest names in the kingdom."

"You are very strangely mistaken, my dear count. I never mentioned the highest names in the kingdom. I merely answered you in reference to the subject of a jealous husband, whose name you did not tell me, and who as a matter of course has a wife. I therefore replied to you, 'In order to see *Madame*, you must get a little more intimate with *Monsieur*.'"

"Wretched jester!" said the count, smiling; "was that what you meant?"

"Nothing else."

"Very good; what then?"

"Now," added Manicamp, "let the question be regarding Madame la Duchesse ——— or M. le Duc ———; very well, I shall say: Let us get into the house, wherever it may be; for that is a scheme which cannot in any case be unfavorable to your love-affair."

"Ah! Manicamp, if you could find me a pretext, a good pretext."

"A pretext, *pardieu!* a hundred, nay, a thousand pretexts. If Malicorne were here, he would have already hit upon fifty thousand excellent pretexts."

"Who is Malicorne?" said De Guiche, half shutting his eyes like a person trying to recollect; "I seem to know that name."

"Know him! I should think so; you owe his father thirty thousand crowns."

"Ah, indeed! so it 's that worthy fellow from Orléans."

"Whom you promised an appointment in Monsieur's household, — not the jealous husband, but the other."

"Well, then, since your friend Malicorne is so clever, let him find me a means of being adored by Monsieur, and a pretext to make my peace with him."

"Very good; I 'll talk to him about it."

"But who is that coming?"

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"Raoul! yes, it is he," said De Guiche, as he hastened forward to meet the young man. "You here, Raoul!" said he.

"Yes, I was looking for you to say farewell, my dear friend," replied Raoul, grasping the count's hand. "How do you do, M. Manicamp?"

"How is this, Viscount, — you are leaving us?"

"Yes, a mission from the king."

"Where are you going?"

"To London. On leaving you, I am going to Madame. She has a letter to give me for his Majesty King Charles II."

"You will find her alone; for Monsieur has gone out, — gone to bathe, in fact."

"In that case you, my dear friend, who are one of

Monsieur's gentlemen in waiting, will undertake to make my excuses to him. I should have waited in order to receive any directions he might have to give me, if the desire for my immediate departure had not been intimated to me by M. Fouquet on behalf of his Majesty."

Manicamp touched De Guiche's elbow. "There 's a pretext for you," said he.

"What?"

"M. de Bragelonne's excuses."

"A weak pretext," said De Guiche.

"An excellent one, if Monsieur is not angry with you; but a paltry one, like any other, if he bears you ill-will."

"You are right, Manicamp; a pretext, whatever it may be, is all I require. And so a pleasant journey to you, Raoul!" and the two friends thereupon took a warm leave of each other.

Five minutes afterwards Raoul entered Madame's apartments, as Mademoiselle de Montalais had begged him to do. Madame was still seated at the table where she had written her letter. Before her was burning the rose-colored taper which she had used to seal it. Only, in her preoccupation, — for Madame seemed to be buried in thought, — she had forgotten to extinguish the taper.

Bragelonne was expected, and was announced, therefore, as soon as he appeared. He was the picture of elegance; it was impossible to see him once without always remembering him; and not only had Madame seen him once, but it will not be forgotten that he was one of the very first who had gone to meet her, and had accompanied her from Havre to Paris. Madame had preserved, therefore, an excellent recollection of Bragelonne. "Ah, Monsieur, here you are!" she said to him; "you are going to see my brother, who will be delighted

to pay to the son a portion of the debt of gratitude he has contracted with the father."

"The Comte de la Fère, Madame, has been abundantly recompensed for the little service he had the happiness to render the king, by the kindness which the king manifested towards him; and it is I who will have to convey to his Majesty the assurance of the respect, devotion, and gratitude of father and son."

"Do you know my brother, Monsieur the Viscount?"

"No, your Highness; I shall have the honor of seeing his Majesty for the first time."

"You require no recommendation to him. At all events, however, if you have any doubt about your personal merit, take me unhesitatingly for your surety."

"Your royal Highness overwhelms me with your kindness."

"No, M. de Bragelonne, I well remember that we were fellow-travellers once, and that I remarked your extreme prudence in the midst of the extravagant absurdities committed, to your right and left, by two of the greatest simpletons in the world, M. de Guiche and the Duke of Buckingham. Let us not speak of them, however, but of yourself. Are you going to England to remain there permanently? Forgive my inquiry; it is not curiosity, but a desire to be of service to you in anything that I can do."

"No, Madame; I am going to England to fulfil a mission which his Majesty has been kind enough to confide to me, — that is all."

"And you propose to return to France?"

"As soon as I shall have accomplished my mission; unless, indeed, his Majesty King Charles II. should have other orders for me."

"He will beg you at the very least, I am sure, to remain near him as long as possible."

"In that case, as I shall not know how to refuse, I will now beforehand entreat your royal Highness to have the goodness to remind the King of France that one of his most devoted servants is far away from him."

"Take care that at the time you are recalled you do not consider his command as an abuse of power."

"I do not understand you, Madame."

"The Court of France is not easily matched, I am aware; but yet we have some pretty women at the Court of England also." Raoul smiled. "Oh," said Madame, "yours is a smile which portends no good to my countrywomen! It is as though you were telling them, M. de Bragelonne, 'I visit you, but I leave my heart on the other side of the Channel.' Did not your smile indicate that?"

"Your Highness is gifted with the power of reading the inmost depths of the soul, and you will understand, therefore, why at present any prolonged residence at the Court of England would be a matter of the deepest regret for me."

"And I need not inquire if so gallant a knight is recompensed in return?"

"I have been brought up, Madame, with her whom I love, and I believe that she has the same feelings towards me that I have for her."

"In that case do not delay your departure, M. de Bragelonne, and delay not your return, for on your return we shall see two persons happy; for I hope that no obstacle exists to your felicity."

"There is a great obstacle to it, Madame."

"Indeed! what is it?"

"The king's wishes on the subject."

"The king's wishes? The king opposes your marriage?"

"Or at least he postpones it. I solicited his Majesty's

consent through the Comte de la Fère; and without absolutely refusing it, he at least positively said that it must be deferred."

"Is the young lady whom you love unworthy of you, then?"

"She is worthy of a king's affection, Madame."

"I mean, she is not, perhaps, of birth equal to your own?"

"She is of an excellent family."

"Is she young and beautiful?"

"She is seventeen, and in my opinion exceedingly beautiful."

"Is she in the country or at Paris?"

"She is at Fontainebleau, Madame."

"At the court?"

"Yes."

"Do I know her?"

"She has the honor to form one of your royal Highness's household."

"Her name?" inquired the princess, anxiously, — "if, indeed," she added, checking herself hastily, "her name is not a secret."

"No, Madame, my affection is too pure for me to make a secret of it to any one, — and with still greater reason to your Highness, whose kindness towards me has been so extreme. It is Mademoiselle Louise de la Vallière."

Madame could not restrain an exclamation, in which there was a feeling stronger than surprise. "Ah!" she said, "La Vallière, — she who yesterday —" She paused, and then continued, "She who yesterday was taken ill, I believe?"

"Yes, Madame; it was only this morning that I heard of the accident which had befallen her."

"Did you see her before you came to me?"

"I had the honor of taking leave of her."

"And you say," resumed Madame, making a powerful effort over herself, "that the king has — deferred your marriage with this young girl?"

"Yes, Madame, deferred it."

"Did he assign any reason for this postponement?"

"None."

"How long is it since the Comte de la Fère preferred his request?"

"More than a month, Madame."

"It is very singular," said the princess, as something like a cloud passed across her eyes. "A month?" she repeated.

"About a month."

"You are right, Monsieur the Viscount," said the princess, with a smile in which Bragelonne might have remarked a kind of restraint; "my brother must not keep you too long over there. Set off at once, and in the first letter I write to England I will claim you in the king's name;" and Madame rose to place her letter in Bragelonne's hands.

Raoul understood that his audience was at an end; he took the letter, bowed low to the princess, and left the room.

"A month!" murmured the princess; "could I have been blind, then, to so great an extent, and could he have loved her for this last month?" And as Madame had nothing to do, she sat down to begin a letter to her brother, the postscript of which was a summons for Bragelonne to return.

The Comte de Guiche, as we have seen, had yielded to the pressing persuasions of Manicamp, and allowed himself to be led to the stables, where they had their horses saddled; then by the side-path, a description of

which has already been given, they advanced to meet Monsieur, who having just finished bathing was returning all fresh towards the château, wearing a woman's veil to protect his face from getting burned by the heat of the sun, which was already great. Monsieur was in one of those fits of good humor with which the admiration of his own good looks sometimes inspired him. As he was bathing he had been able to compare the whiteness of his body with that of his courtiers; and thanks to the care which his royal Highness took of himself, no one, not even the Chevalier de Lorraine, could bear the comparison. Monsieur, moreover, had been tolerably successful in swimming, and his muscles having been properly exercised by the invigorating immersion in the cool water, he was in a light and cheerful state of mind and body; so that at the sight of De Guiche, who advanced to meet him at a hand gallop, mounted upon a magnificent white horse, the prince could not restrain an exclamation of delight.

"I think matters look well," said Manicamp, who fancied he could read this friendly disposition upon his royal Highness's countenance.

"Ah, good-day, Guiche! good-day, my poor Guiche!" exclaimed the prince.

"Long life to your Highness!" replied De Guiche, encouraged by the tone of Philip's voice; "health, joy, happiness, and prosperity to your Highness!"

"Welcome, Guiche! Come on my right side, but keep your horse in hand, for I wish to return at a walking pace, under the cool shade of these trees."

"At your service, Monseigneur," replied De Guiche, taking his place on the prince's right, as he had just been invited to do.

"Now, my dear De Guiche," said the prince, "give

me a little news of that De Guiche whom I used to know formerly, and who used to pay attentions to my wife."

De Guiche blushed to the very whites of his eyes; while Monsieur burst out laughing, as though he had made the wittiest remark in the world. The few privileged courtiers who surrounded Monsieur thought it their duty to follow his example, although they had not heard the remark; and a noisy burst of laughter immediately followed, beginning with the first courtier, passing on through the whole company, and only terminating with the last. De Guiche, although blushing extremely, put a good countenance on the matter. Manicamp was watching him.

"Ah, Monseigneur," replied De Guiche, "show a little charity towards an unfortunate man; do not hold me up to the ridicule of M. le Chevalier de Lorraine."

"How do you mean?"

"If he hears you ridicule me, he will go beyond your Highness, and will show no pity."

"About your passion for the princess?"

"For mercy's sake, Monseigneur!"

"Come, come, De Guiche, confess that you did get a little sweet upon Madame."

"Never will I confess such a thing, Monseigneur!"

"Out of respect for me? Well, I release you from your respect, De Guiche. Confess, as if it were simply a question about Mademoiselle de Chalais or Mademoiselle de la Vallière." Then breaking off, he said, beginning to laugh again: "Come, that is very good, — a remark like a sword which cuts two ways at once. I hit you and my brother at the same time, — Chalais and La Vallière, your affianced bride and his future lady-love."

"Really, Monseigneur," said the count, "you are in a most brilliant humor to-day."

"Yes, upon my word, I feel well; and then I am pleased to see you again."

"Thank you, Monseigneur."

"But you were angry with me, were you not?"

"I, Monseigneur? Why should I have been so?"

"Because I interfered with your sarabands and your other Spanish amusements. Nay, do not deny it! On that day when you left the princess's apartments with your eyes full of fury, — that brought you ill luck, my dear fellow, for you danced in the ballet yesterday in a most miserable manner. Now don't get sulky, De Guiche, for it does you no good, but makes you look as surly as a bear. If the princess did look at you attentively yesterday, I am quite sure of one thing."

"What is that, Monseigneur? Your Highness alarms me."

"She has quite forsworn you now," said the prince, laughing still louder.

"Decidedly," thought Manicamp, "rank has nothing to do with it, and all men are alike."

The prince continued: "At all events, here you are back again; and it is to be hoped that the chevalier will become amiable again."

"How so, Monseigneur; and by what miracle can I exercise such an influence over M. de Lorraine?"

"The matter is very simple; he is jealous of you."

"Bah! it is not possible."

"It is the case, though."

"He does me too much honor, then."

"The fact is that when you are here he is full of kindness and attention, but when you are gone he makes me suffer a perfect martrydom. I am like a see-saw. Besides, you do not know the idea which has struck me."

"I do not even suspect it, Monseigneur."

"Well, then, when you were in exile, — for you really were exiled, my poor Guiche — "

"*Pardieu*, Monseigneur; but whose fault was it?" said De Guiche, pretending to speak in an angry tone.

"Not mine, certainly, my dear count," replied his royal Highness; "upon my honor, I did not ask the king to exile you."

"No, not you, Monseigneur, I am well aware; but — "

"But Madame; well, so far as that goes, I do not say that it is not the case. What the deuce did you do or say to Madame?"

"Really, Monseigneur — "

"Women I know have their grudges, and my wife is not free from caprices of that nature. But if she were the cause of your being exiled, I bear you no ill-will."

"In that case, Monseigneur," said De Guiche, "I am not unhappy altogether."

Manicamp, who was following closely behind De Guiche, and who did not lose a word of what the prince was saying, bent down to his very shoulders over his horse's neck, in order to conceal the laughter he could not repress.

"Besides, your exile started a project in my head."

"Good."

"When the chevalier, finding that you were no longer here, and sure of reigning undisturbed, began to bully me, I, observing that my wife, in the most perfect contrast to that wicked fellow, was most kind and amiable towards me, who had neglected her so much, conceived the idea of becoming a model husband, — a rarity, a curiosity, at the court; and I had an idea of getting very fond of my wife."

De Guiche looked at the prince with an air of amazement, which was not assumed. "Oh, Monseigneur," he

stammered tremblingly, "surely that idea did not seriously occur to you?"

"Indeed, it did. I have some property that my brother gave me on my marriage. My wife has some money of her own, and not a little either; for she gets money from her brother and brother-in-law, — from England and France. Well, we should have left the court. I should have retired to my château at Villers-Cotterets, which is part of my appanage, situated in the middle of a forest, in which we should have led a most sentimental life in the very same spot where my grandfather, Henry IV., lived with La Belle Gabrielle. What do you think of that idea, De Guiche?"

"Why, it is enough to make one shudder, Monseigneur," replied De Guiche, who shuddered in reality.

"Ah! I see that you would never be able to endure being exiled a second time."

"I, Monseigneur?"

"I will not carry you off with us, then, as I had at first intended."

"What! with you, Monseigneur?"

"Yes, if the idea should again occur to me of taking a dislike to the court."

"Oh, do not let that make any difference, Monseigneur! I would follow your Highness to the end of the world."

"Clumsy fellow that you are!" growled Manicamp, pushing his horse towards De Guiche so as almost to unseat him; and then, as Manicamp passed close to him, as if he had lost his command over the horse, he whispered, "For goodness' sake, think what you are saying!"

"Well, it is agreed, then," said the prince; "since you are so devoted to me, I shall take you with me."

"Anywhere, everywhere, Monseigneur," replied De

Guiche, in a joyous tone, — "whenever you like, and at once too. Are you ready?"

De Guiche laughingly gave his horse the rein, and galloped forward a few yards.

"One moment," said the prince. "Let us go to the château first."

"What for?"

"Why, to take my wife, of course!"

"What for?" asked De Guiche.

"Why, since I tell you that it is a project of conjugal affection, it is necessary that I should take my wife with me."

"In that case, Monseigneur," replied the count, "I am greatly concerned, but no De Guiche for you."

"Bah!"

"Yes. Why do you take Madame with you?"

"Because I begin to see that I love her," said the prince.

De Guiche turned slightly pale, but endeavored to preserve his seeming gayety.

"If you love Madame, Monseigneur," he said, "that ought to be quite enough for you, and you have no further need of your friends."

"Not bad, not bad," murmured Manicamp.

"There! your fear of Madame has begun again," replied the prince.

"Why, Monseigneur, I have experienced that to my cost, — a woman who was the cause of my being exiled!"

"What a horrible disposition you have, De Guiche! How terribly you bear malice!"

"I should like the case to be your own, Monseigneur."

"Decidedly, then, that was the reason why you danced so badly yesterday; you wished to revenge yourself, I suppose, by trying to make Madame make a mistake in

her dancing. Ah! that is very paltry, De Guiche, and I will tell Madame of it."

"You can tell her whatever you please, Monseigneur; for her Highness cannot hate me more than at present."

"Nonsense! you are exaggerating; and this merely because of the fortnight's sojourn in the country which she imposed on you."

"Monseigneur, a fortnight is a fortnight; and when the time was passed in being bored, a fortnight is an eternity!"

"So that you will not forgive her?"

"Never!"

"Come, come, De Guiche, be a better-disposed fellow than that! I wish to make your peace with her. You will find in conversing with her that she has no malice or unkindness in her nature, and that she is full of intelligence."

"Monseigneur —"

"You will see that she can receive her friends like a princess, and laugh like a citizen's wife; you will see that when she pleases she can make the hours pass away like minutes. De Guiche, my friend, you must really make up your differences with my wife."

"Upon my word," said Manicamp to himself, "here is a husband whose wife's name will bring him ill-luck; and King Candaules of old was a veritable tiger beside his royal Highness."

"At all events," added the prince, "you will make it up with my wife, De Guiche, — I am sure you will! Only, I must show you how. There is nothing commonplace about her, and it is not every one who takes her fancy."

"Monseigneur —"

"No resistance, De Guiche, or I shall get out of temper," replied the prince.

"Well, since he will have it so," murmured Manicamp in De Guiche's ear, "do as he wants you to do."

"Well, Monseigneur," said the count, "I will obey."

"And to begin," resumed the prince, "there will be cards this evening in Madame's apartment; you will dine with me, and I will take you there with me."

"Oh! as for that, Monseigneur," objected De Guiche, "you will allow me to decline."

"What! again? This is positive rebellion!"

"Madame received me too indifferently yesterday, before the whole court."

"Really!" said the prince, laughing.

"Nay; so much so, indeed, that she did not even answer me when I addressed her. It may be a good thing to be wanting in self-love; but too little is too little, as the saying is."

"Count, after dinner you will go to your own apartments and dress yourself, and then you will come to go with me. I shall wait for you."

"Since your Highness absolutely commands it —"

"Positively."

"He 'll not let go his hold," said Manicamp; "these are the things to which husbands cling most obstinately. Ah, what a pity M. Molière could not have heard this man! He would have put him into verse."

The prince and his court, chatting in this manner, returned to the coolest apartments of the château.

"By the by," said De Guiche, as they were standing by the door, "I had a commission for your royal Highness."

"Execute it, then."

"M. de Bragelonne has by the king's order set out for London, and he charged me with his respects for you, Monseigneur."

"A pleasant journey to the viscount, whom I like

very much. Go and dress yourself, De Guiche, and come back for me. If you don't come back —"

"What will happen then, Monseigneur?"

"I will get you thrown into the Bastille."

"Well," said De Guiche, laughing, "his royal Highness Monsieur is decidedly the counterpart of her royal Highness Madame: Madame gets me sent into exile because she does not care for me sufficiently, and Monsieur gets me imprisoned because he cares for me too much. I thank Monsieur, and I thank Madame."

"Come, come!" said the prince; "you are a delightful companion, and you know well that I cannot do without you. Return as soon as you can."

"Very well; but I am inclined to be a little whimsical myself, Monseigneur."

"Bah!"

"So that I will not return to your royal Highness except upon one condition."

"Name it."

"I want to oblige the friend of one of my friends."

"What 's his name?"

"Malicorne."

"An ugly name."

"But very well borne, Monseigneur."

"That may be. Well?"

"Well, I owe M. Malicorne a place in your household, Monseigneur."

"What kind of place?"

"Any kind of place, — a supervision of some sort or other, for instance."

"That happens very fortunately, for yesterday I dismissed my master of apartments."

"That will do admirably, Monseigneur. What are his duties?"

"Nothing, except to look about and make his report."

"A sort of interior police?"

"Exactly."

"Ah, how excellently that will suit Malicorne!" Manicamp ventured to say.

"You know the person of whom we are speaking, M. Manicamp?" inquired the prince.

"Intimately, Monseigneur; I am the friend in question."

"And your opinion is — "

"That your Highness will never have another master of apartments equal to him."

"How much does the appointment bring in?" inquired the count of the prince.

"I have n't the least idea; but I have always understood that he could make as much as he pleased when he was well occupied."

"What do you call being well occupied, Prince?"

"It means, of course, when the functionary in question is a man with his wits about him."

"In that case I think your Highness will be content; for Malicorne is as sharp as the Devil himself."

"Good! The appointment will be an expensive one for me in that case," replied the prince, laughing. "You are making me a positive present, Count."

"I believe so, Monseigneur."

"Well, go and announce to your M. Mélicorne — "

"Malicorne, Monseigneur."

"I shall never get hold of that name."

"You say Manicamp very well, Monseigneur."

"Oh, I shall say Manicorne very well too! Custom will help me."

"Say what you like, Monseigneur, I can promise you

that your inspector of apartments will not be annoyed; he is of the happiest disposition possible."

"Well, then, my dear De Guiche, inform him of his nomination. But, stay —"

"What is it, Monseigneur?"

"I wish to see him beforehand; if he be as ugly as his name, I retract what I have said."

"Your Highness knows him, for you have already seen him at the Palais-Royal; nay, indeed, it was I who presented him to you."

"Ah, I remember now, — not a bad-looking fellow."

"I knew that you must have noticed him, Monseigneur."

"Yes, yes, yes. You see, De Guiche, I do not wish that either my wife or myself should have ugly faces before our eyes. My wife will have all her maids of honor pretty; I, all the gentlemen about me good-looking. In this way, De Guiche, you see that any children we may have will run a good chance of being pretty; we shall have had handsome models before us."

"Most powerfully argued, Monseigneur," said Manicamp, showing his approval by look and voice at the same time.

As for De Guiche, he very probably did not find the argument so convincing; for he merely signified his opinion by a gesture, which moreover exhibited in a marked manner great indecision of mind on the subject. Manicamp went off to inform Malicorne of the good news he had just learned. De Guiche seemed very unwilling to take his departure for the purpose of making his court toilet. Monsieur, singing, laughing, and admiring himself, passed away the time until the dinner-hour in a frame of mind which would have justified the proverb, "Happy as a prince."

CHAPTER LX.

STORY OF A NAIAD AND OF A DRYAD.

EVERY one had partaken of the banquet at the château, and had afterwards dressed for the court. The usual hour for the banquet was five o'clock. If we say, then, that it occupied an hour, and the toilet two hours, it will appear that everybody was ready at about eight o'clock in the evening. Towards eight o'clock, then, the guests began to arrive at Madame's; for we have already intimated that it was Madame who "received" that evening. At Madame's *soirées* no one failed to be present; for the evenings passed in her apartments had always that perfect charm about them which the queen, that pious and excellent princess, had not been able to confer upon her assemblies. It is unfortunately one of the qualities of goodness to be less amusing than malicious wit. And yet, let us hasten to add that such a style of wit could not be attributed to Madame; for her disposition of mind, naturally of the very highest order, comprised too much true generosity, too many noble impulses and elevated thoughts, to justify any one in calling her ill-natured. But Madame was endowed with a spirit of resistance, — a gift very frequently fatal to its possessor, for he is broken where another would have bent; the result was that blows did not become deadened upon her as upon what might be termed the wadded feelings of Maria Theresa. Her heart rebounded at each attack; and like those aggressive quintains of the ring game, even if she were struck in a

manner almost to stun her, she returned blow for blow to any one who might be imprudent enough to venture to tilt against her. Was this really waywardness of disposition, or was it simply malice? We regard those rich and powerful natures as like the tree of knowledge, producing good and evil at the same time: a double branch, always blooming and fruitful, the good fruit of which is distinguished by those who hunger for it, but which yields poison for the worthless and wicked, who die of it, — a thing not to be regretted. Madame, then, who had in her mind a well-digested plan of constituting herself the second, if not even the principal queen of the court, rendered her receptions delightful to all, by the conversation, the opportunities of meeting, and the perfect liberty which she allowed to every one of making any remark he pleased, on the condition, however, that the remark was amusing or sensible. It will easily be believed that for that very reason there was less talking at Madame's than elsewhere. Madame hated loquacious people, and took a very cruel revenge upon them, for she allowed them to talk. She disliked pretension, too, and never overlooked that defect, even in the king himself. That was Monsieur's complaint, and the princess had undertaken the tremendous task of curing him of it. As for the rest, poets, wits, beautiful women, all were received by her with the air of a mistress superior to her slaves, — sufficiently meditative in her liveliest humors to make poets meditate; sufficiently pretty to dazzle by her attractions, even among the prettiest; sufficiently witty for the most distinguished persons present to listen to her with pleasure. It will be seen that such assemblies as were held in Madame's apartments must have been very attractive. All who were young flocked there; and when the king himself happens to be young, everybody at court is so

too. And so the older ladies of the court, the strong-minded women of the regency or of the last reign, pouted and sulked at their ease; but others answered these fits of sulkiness by laughing at those venerable individuals who had carried the love of authority so far as even to have taken the command of bodies of soldiers in the war of the Fronde, in order, as Madame asserted, not to lose their influence over men altogether.

As eight o'clock struck, her royal Highness entered the great drawing-room with her ladies of honor, and found several gentlemen belonging to the court already there, having been waiting for some minutes. Among those who had arrived before the hour fixed for the reception she looked around for the one who she thought ought to have been the first in attendance, but she did not find him there. However, almost at the very moment she had completed her investigation, Monsieur was announced.

Monsieur was splendid to behold. All the precious stones and jewels of Cardinal Mazarin, which of course that minister could not do otherwise than leave; all the queen-mother's jewels, as well as a few others belonging to his wife, — Monsieur wore them all, and he was as dazzling as the sun.

Behind Monsieur followed De Guiche, with hesitating steps, and with an air of contrition admirably assumed. De Guiche wore a costume of French-gray velvet, embroidered with silver, and trimmed with blue ribbons; he wore also Mechlin lace, as rare and beautiful of its sort as were the jewels of Monsieur. The plume in his hat was red. Madame, too, wore several colors; she preferred red for hangings, gray for dresses, and blue for flowers. M. de Guiche, dressed as we have described, looked so handsome that he excited every one's observation. With an interesting pallor of complexion, a languid

expression of the eyes, his white hands seen through the masses of lace which covered them, the melancholy expression of his mouth, — it was only necessary, indeed, to see M. de Guiche to admit that few men at the Court of France could equal him. The consequence was that Monsieur, who was pretentious enough to fancy that he could eclipse a star even, if it should place itself in competition with him, was, on the contrary, completely eclipsed in every one's fancy, — which is a very silent judge certainly, but very positive and high in its judgment.

Madame had looked at De Guiche without expression; but vague as her look had been, it had brought a delightful color to his face. In fact, Madame had thought De Guiche so handsome and so admirably dressed that she almost ceased regretting the royal conquest which she felt was on the point of escaping her. Her heart, therefore, in spite of herself, sent the blood to her face.

Monsieur, assuming his most determined air, approached her. He had not noticed the princess's blush; or if he had seen it, he was far from attributing it to its true cause. "Madame," he said, kissing his wife's hand, "there is some one present here who has fallen into disgrace, — an unhappy exile, whom I would venture to recommend to your kindness. Do not forget, I beg, that he is one of my best friends, and that your kind reception of him will please me greatly."

"Of what exile, what disgraced person are you speaking?" inquired Madame, looking all round her and not permitting her glance to rest on the count more than on the others.

This was the moment to present his *protégé;* and the prince drew aside to let De Guiche pass him, who with a tolerably well-assumed awkwardness of manner approached Madame and made his reverence to her.

"What!" exclaimed Madame, as if she were greatly surprised; "is M. le Comte de Guiche the disgraced individual you speak of, — the exile?"

"Yes, certainly," returned the prince.

"Indeed," said Madame, "there is no one else here."

"You are unjust, Madame," said the prince.

"I?"

"Certainly. Come, forgive the poor fellow."

"Forgive him what? What have I to forgive M. de Guiche?"

"Come, explain yourself, De Guiche! What do you wish to be forgiven?" inquired the prince.

"Alas! her royal Highness knows very well what it is," replied the latter, in a hypocritical tone.

"Come, come, give him your hand, Madame!" said Philip.

"If it will give you any pleasure, Monsieur;" and with a movement of her eyes and shoulders which it would be impossible to describe, Madame extended the young man her beautiful and perfumed hand, upon which he pressed his lips.

Apparently the count lingered a little, and Madame did not withdraw her hand too quickly; for the prince added: "De Guiche is not wickedly disposed, Madame; and he certainly will not bite you."

A pretext was given in the gallery by Monsieur's remark, which was not perhaps very laughable, for every one to laugh hilariously. The situation was odd enough, and some kindly disposed persons had observed it. Monsieur was still enjoying the effect of his remark, when the king was announced.

The appearance of the room at this moment we will try to describe. In the centre, before the fireplace, which was filled with flowers, Madame was standing, with her

maids of honor formed in two wings on either side of her, around whom the butterflies of the court were fluttering. Several other groups occupied the recesses of the windows, like soldiers stationed in their different towers who belong to the same garrison; and from their respective places they could overhear the remarks which proceeded from the principal group. From one of these groups, the nearest to the fireplace, Malicorne, who had been at once, through Manicamp and De Guiche, raised to the dignity of the post of master of the apartments, and whose official costume had been ready for the last two months, was brilliant with gold lace, and shone upon Montalais, standing on Madame's extreme left, with all the fire of his eyes and all the splendor of his velvet. Madame was conversing with Mademoiselle de Châtillon and Mademoiselle de Créqui, who were next to her, and addressed a few words to Monsieur, who drew aside as soon as the king was announced. Mademoiselle de la Vallière, like Montalais, was on Madame's left hand, and the last but one on the line, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente being on her right. She was stationed, as are certain bodies of troops whose weakness is suspected, and who are placed between two experienced regiments. Thus flanked by her two companions who had shared her adventure, La Vallière, whether from regret at Raoul's departure, or still suffering from the emotion caused by recent events which had begun to render her name familiar on the lips of the courtiers, — La Vallière, we repeat, hid her eyes, somewhat red with weeping, behind her fan, and seemed to give the greatest attention to the remarks which Montalais and Athenaïs alternately whispered to her from time to time.

As soon as the king's name was announced, a general movement took place in the drawing-room. Madame, in

her character as hostess, rose to receive the royal visitor; but as she rose, notwithstanding her preoccupation of mind, she glanced hastily towards her right. Her glance, which the presumptuous De Guiche regarded as intended for himself, rested, as it swept over the whole circle, upon La Vallière, whose vivid blush and restless emotion it immediately perceived.

The king advanced to the middle of the group, which had now become a general one by a movement that took place, of course, from the circumference to the centre. Every head bowed low before his Majesty, the ladies bending like frail and magnificent lilies before the King Aquilo. There was nothing very severe, we will even say nothing very royal, that evening about the king, except, however, his youth and good looks. He wore an air of animated joyousness and good-humor which set all imaginations at work; and thereupon all present promised themselves a delightful evening, for no other reason than the apparent desire of his Majesty to amuse himself at Madame's assembly.

If there was any one in particular whose high spirits and good-humor could equal the king's, it was M. de Saint-Aignan, who was dressed in a rose-colored costume, with face and ribbons of the same color, — particularly rose-colored in his ideas, for that evening M. de Saint-Aignan was prolific in ideas. The circumstance which had given a new expansion to the numerous schemes germinating in his cheerful mind was that he had just perceived that Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente was, like himself, dressed in rose-color. We would not wish to say, however, that the wily courtier had not known beforehand that the beautiful Athenaïs was to wear that particular color; for he very well knew the art of unlocking the lips of a dressmaker or maid as to her

mistress's intentions. He cast as many killing glances at Mademoiselle Athenaïs as he had bows of ribbon on his hose and doublet, — in other words, an immense number.

The king having paid Madame the customary compliments, and Madame having requested him to be seated, the circle was immediately formed. Louis inquired of Monsieur the particulars of the day's bathing; and stated, looking at the ladies while he spoke, that certain poets were engaged in turning into verse the enchanting diversion of the baths of Valvins, and that one of them particularly, M. Loret, seemed to have been intrusted with the confidence of some water-nymph, as he had in his verses recounted many circumstances that were actually true, — at which remark more than one lady present felt herself bound to blush. The king at this moment took the opportunity of looking round him more leisurely. Montalais was the only one who did not blush sufficiently to prevent her looking at the king, and she saw him fix his eyes most devouringly upon Mademoiselle de la Vallière. This undaunted maid of honor, Mademoiselle de Montalais, be it understood, forced the king to lower his gaze, and so saved Louise de la Vallière from a sympathetic warmth of feeling which this gaze might possibly have awakened. Louis was appropriated by Madame, who overwhelmed him with inquiries, — and no one in the world knew how to ask questions better than she. He tried, however, to render the conversation general, and with the view of effecting this he redoubled his wit and his devotion to her.

Madame coveted complimentary remarks, and determined to procure them at any cost, she addressed herself to the king, saying, "Sire, your Majesty, who is aware of everything which occurs in your kingdom, ought to know

beforehand the verses confided to M. Loret by this nymph; will your Majesty kindly communicate them to us?"

"Madame," replied the king, with perfect grace of manner, "I dare not, — you, personally, might be in no little degree confused at having to listen to certain details. But De Saint-Aignan tells a story tolerably well, and has a perfect recollection of the verses; if he does not remember them, he will invent. I can certify him to be almost a poet himself."

De Saint-Aignan, thus brought prominently forward, was compelled to introduce himself as advantageously as possible. Unfortunately, however, for Madame, he thought of his own personal affairs only; in other words, instead of paying Madame the compliments which she so much desired and relished, his mind was fixed upon making as much display as possible of his own good fortune. Again glancing, therefore, for the hundredth time at the beautiful Athenaïs, who put into practice her theory of the previous evening, — that is, did not deign to look at her adorer, — he said, "Sire, your Majesty will perhaps pardon me for having too indifferently remembered the verses which the nymph dictated to Loret; but if the king has not retained any recollection of them, what could I possibly remember?"

Madame did not receive this shortcoming of the courtier very favorably.

"Ah! Madame," added De Saint-Aignan, "at present it is no longer a question what the water-nymphs have to say; and one would almost be tempted to believe that nothing of any interest now occurs in those liquid realms. It is upon the earth, Madame, that important events happen. Ah! Madame, upon the earth how many tales there are full of —"

"Well," said Madame, "and what is taking place upon the earth?"

"That question must be asked of the dryads," replied the count; "the dryads inhabit the forests, as your royal Highness is aware."

"I am aware, also, that they are naturally very talkative, M. de Saint-Aignan."

"Such is the case, Madame; but when they say only delightful things, it would be ungracious to accuse them of being too talkative."

"Do they talk so delightfully, then?" inquired the princess, indifferently. "Really, M. de Saint-Aignan, you excite my curiosity; and if I were the king, I would require you immediately to tell us what the delightful things are which these dryads have been saying, since you alone seem to understand their language."

"I am perfectly at his Majesty's orders, Madame, in that respect," replied the count, quickly.

"What a fortunate fellow this Saint-Aignan is, to understand the language of the dryads!" said Monsieur.

"I understand it perfectly, Monseigneur, as I do my own language."

"Tell us all about them, then," said Madame.

The king felt embarrassed; for his confidant was in all probability about to launch forth upon a delicate subject. He foresaw it in the general attention excited by De Saint-Aignan's preamble, and aroused too by Madame's peculiar manner. The most reserved of those who were present seemed ready to devour every syllable the count was about to pronounce. They coughed, drew closer together, looked curiously at certain of the maids of honor, who in order to support with greater propriety or with more steadiness the fixity of the inquisitorial looks bent upon them adjusted their fans accordingly,

and assumed the bearing of a duellist who is about to be exposed to his adversary's fire.

At this epoch the fashion of ingeniously constructed discourse and hazardously dangerous recitals so prevailed that at the point where in modern times a whole company assembled in a drawing-room would begin to suspect some scandal or disclosure or tragic event and would hurry away in dismay, Madame's guests quietly settled themselves in their places, in order not to lose a word or gesture of the comedy composed by M. de Saint-Aignan for their benefit, the *dénouement* of which, whatever the style and the plot might be, must as a matter of course be marked by the most perfect propriety. The count was known as a man of extreme refinement and an admirable narrator. He courageously began, then, amid a profound silence which would have been formidable to any one but himself: —

"Madame, by the king's permission, I address myself, in the first place, to your royal Highness, since you admit yourself to be the person present possessing the greatest curiosity. I have the honor, therefore, to inform your royal Highness that the dryad more particularly inhabits the hollows of oaks; and as dryads are mythological creatures of great beauty, they inhabit the most beautiful trees, — in other words, the largest to be found."

At this exordium, which recalled under a transparent veil the celebrated story of the royal oak which had played so important a part in the last evening, so many hearts began to beat, both from mirth and uneasiness, that if De Saint-Aignan had not had a good and sonorous voice, their throbbings might have been heard above the sound of his voice.

"There must surely be dryads at Fontainebleau, then,"

said Madame, in a perfectly calm voice; "for I have never in all my life seen finer oaks than in the royal park;" and as she spoke, she directed towards De Guiche a look of which he had no reason to complain, as he had of the one that preceded it, — which, as we have already mentioned, had a character of indefiniteness most painful to so loving a heart as his.

"Precisely, Madame; it is of Fontainebleau that I was about to speak to your royal Highness," said De Saint-Aignan; "for the dryad whose story is engaging our attention lives in the park belonging to the château of his Majesty."

The narrative was fairly entered upon; the action was begun, and it was no longer possible for audience or narrator to draw back.

"It will be worth listening to," said Madame; "for the story not only appears to me to have all the charm of a national incident, but still more seems to be a circumstance of very recent occurrence."

"I ought to begin at the beginning," said the count. "In the first place, then, there live at Fontainebleau, in a fine-appearing cottage, two shepherds. The one is the shepherd Tyrcis, the owner of extensive domains transmitted to him from his parents by right of inheritance. Tyrcis is young and handsome, and his many qualifications make him the first and foremost among the shepherds in the whole country; one might even boldly say that he is the king of them." A subdued murmur of approbation encouraged the narrator, who continued: "His strength equals his courage; no one displays greater address in hunting wild beasts, nor greater wisdom in matters where judgment is required. Whenever he mounts and exercises his horse on the beautiful plains of his inheritance, or whenever he joins with the shep-

herds who owe him allegiance, in different games of skill and strength, one might say that it is the god Mars darting his lance on the plains of Thrace, or, even better, that it is Apollo himself, the god of day, radiant upon earth, bearing his flaming darts in his hand."

Every one understood that this allegorical portrait of the king was not the worst exordium that the narrator could have chosen; and it did not fail to produce its effect, either upon the audience, which from duty or inclination applauded it to the very echo, or upon the king himself, to whom flattery was very agreeable when delicately conveyed, and whom indeed it did not always displease even when it was a little too broad.

De Saint-Aignan then continued: "It is not in games of glory only, ladies, that the shepherd Tyrcis has acquired that reputation by which he is regarded as the king of shepherds."

"Of the shepherds of Fontainebleau," said the king, smilingly, to Madame.

"Oh!" exclaimed Madame, "Fontainebleau is selected arbitrarily by the poet; but I should say, of the shepherds of the whole world."

The king forgot his part of a passive auditor, and bowed.

"It is," pursued De Saint-Aignan, amid a flattering murmur of applause, — "it is, above all, with the fair that the qualities of this king of the shepherds are most prominently displayed. He is a shepherd with a mind as refined as his heart is pure; he can pay a compliment with a charm of manner whose fascination it is impossible to resist; and in his attachments he is so discreet that his lovely and happy conquests may regard their lot as more than enviable. Never a syllable of disclosure, or a moment's forgetfulness! Whoever has seen and

heard Tyrcis must love him; whoever loves and is beloved by him, has indeed found happiness."

De Saint-Aignan here paused. He was enjoying the pleasures of his own compliments; and the portrait he had drawn, however grotesquely inflated it might be, had found favor in certain ears, for whom the perfections of the shepherd did not seem to have been exaggerated.

Madame begged the orator to continue.

"Tyrcis," said the count, "had a faithful companion, or rather a devoted servant, whose name was — Amyntas."

"Ah!" said Madame, archly, "now for the portrait of Amyntas; you are such an excellent painter, M. de Saint-Aignan."

"Madame —"

"Oh, Comte de Saint-Aignan, do not, I entreat you, sacrifice poor Amyntas! I should never forgive you."

"Madame, Amyntas is of too humble a position, particularly beside Tyrcis, for his person to be honored by a parallel. There are certain friends who resemble those servants of ancient times who suffered themselves to be buried alive at their masters' feet. Amyntas's place, too, is at the feet of Tyrcis. He cares for no other; and if sometimes the illustrious hero —"

"Illustrious shepherd, do you mean?" said Madame, pretending to correct M. de Saint-Aignan.

"Your royal Highness is right; I made a mistake," returned the courtier. "If, I say, the shepherd Tyrcis deigns occasionally to call Amyntas his friend and to open his heart to him, it is an unparalleled favor, which the latter regards as the most unbounded felicity."

"All that you say," interrupted Madame, "establishes the extreme devotion of Amyntas to Tyrcis, but does not furnish us with the portrait of Amyntas. Count, do not

flatter him, if you like; but describe him to us. I will have Amyntas's portrait."

De Saint-Aignan obeyed, after having bowed profoundly to his Majesty's sister-in-law. "Amyntas," he said, "is somewhat older than Tyrcis. He is not an altogether ill-favored shepherd; it is even said that the Muses condescended to smile upon him at his birth, even as Hebe smiled upon youth. He is not ambitious to shine, but he is ambitious of being loved; and he might not perhaps be found unworthy of it, if he were only sufficiently well-known."

This latter sentence, strengthened by a very killing glance, was directed straight to Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who met the shock unmoved. But the modesty and tact of the allusion had produced a good effect. Amyntas reaped the benefit of it in the applause bestowed on him; Tyrcis's head had even given the signal for it by a consenting nod full of good-will.

"One evening," continued De Saint-Aignan, "Tyrcis and Amyntas were walking together in the forest, talking of their love disappointments. Do not forget, ladies, that the story of the dryad is now beginning; otherwise it would be easy to tell you what Tyrcis and Amyntas, the two most discreet shepherds of the whole earth, were talking about. They had reached the thickest part of the forest for the purpose of being quite alone and of confiding their troubles more freely to each other, when suddenly the sound of voices struck upon their ears."

"Ah, ah!" said those who surrounded the narrator. "Nothing can be more interesting than this."

At this point Madame, like a vigilant general inspecting his army, glanced at Montalais and Tonnay-Charente, who were drooping under the strain.

"These harmonious voices," resumed De Saint-Aignan,

"were those of certain shepherdesses, who had been likewise desirous of enjoying the coolness of the shade, and who, knowing the isolated and almost unapproachable situation of the place, had betaken themselves thither to interchange their ideas upon the sheepfold."

A loud burst of laughter, occasioned by this remark of De Saint-Aignan, and an imperceptible smile of the king as he looked at Tonnay-Charente, followed this sally.

"The dryad affirms positively," continued De Saint-Aignan, "that the shepherdesses were three in number, and that all were young and beautiful."

"What were their names?" said Madame, quietly.

"Their names?" said De Saint-Aignan, who hesitated from the fear of committing an indiscretion.

"Of course! You called your shepherds Tyrcis and Amyntas; give your shepherdesses names in a similar manner."

"Oh, Madame, I am not an inventor, an improvisator; I relate simply what took place, as the dryad related it to me."

"What did your dryad, then, call these shepherdesses? You have a very treacherous memory, I fear. This dryad must have fallen out with the goddess Mnemosyne."

"These shepherdesses, Madame — Pray remember that it is a crime to betray a woman's name."

"From which a woman absolves you, Count, on condition that you reveal the names of the shepherdesses."

"Their names were Phyllis, Amaryllis, and Galatea."

"Very well; they have not lost by the delay," said Madame, "for we have three charming names. But now for their portraits."

De Saint-Aignan again started.

"Nay, Count, let us proceed in due order," returned

Madame. "Ought we not, Sire, to have the portraits of the shepherdesses?"

The king, who expected this determined perseverance and who began to feel some uneasiness, did not think it safe to provoke so dangerous an interrogator. He thought, too, that De Saint-Aignan in drawing the portraits would find a means of insinuating some flattering allusions which would be agreeable to the ears of one whom his Majesty was interested in pleasing. It was with this hope and with this fear that Louis authorized De Saint-Aignan to sketch the portraits of the shepherdesses, — Phyllis, Amaryllis, and Galatea.

"Very well, then, be it so," said De Saint-Aignan, like a man who has made up his mind; and he began.

CHAPTER LXI.

CONCLUSION OF THE STORY OF A NAIAD AND OF A DRYAD.

"PHYLLIS," said De Saint-Aignan, with a glance of defiance at Montalais, such as a fencing-master would give who invites an antagonist worthy of him to place himself on his guard, — "Phyllis is neither fair nor dark, neither tall nor short, neither too grave nor too gay; though but a shepherdess, she is as witty as a princess and as coquettish as a demon. Nothing can equal her excellent vision. Her heart yearns for everything that her gaze embraces. She is like a bird which, always warbling, at one moment skims along the grass, at the next rises fluttering in pursuit of a butterfly, then perches upon the topmost branch of a tree, where it defies the bird-catchers either to come and seize it or to entice it into their nets."

The portrait bore such a strong resemblance to Montalais that all eyes were directed towards her. She, however, with her head raised and with a steady unmoved look, listened to M. de Saint-Aignan as if he were speaking of some one who was a complete stranger to her.

"Is that all, M. de Saint-Aignan?" inquired the princess.

"Oh, your royal Highness, the portrait is a mere sketch, and many additions could be made; but I am afraid of wearying your Highness's patience, or offending the modesty of the shepherdess, and I shall therefore pass on to her companion, Amaryllis."

"Very well," said Madame, "pass on to Amaryllis, M. de Saint-Aignan; we are all attention."

"Amaryllis is the eldest of the three, and yet," De Saint-Aignan hastened to add, "this advanced age does not reach twenty years."

Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, who had slightly knitted her brows at the beginning of the description, unbent them with a faint smile.

"She is tall, with an immense quantity of hair, which she dresses in the manner of the Grecian statues. Her walk is full of majesty, her attitude haughty. She has the air, therefore, of a goddess rather than of a mere mortal; and among the goddesses she most resembles Diana the huntress, — with this sole difference, however, that the cruel shepherdess, having one day stolen the quiver of Love while poor Cupid was sleeping in a thicket of roses, instead of directing her arrows against the denizens of the forest, discharges them most pitilessly against all the poor shepherds who pass within reach of her bow."

"Oh, what a wicked shepherdess!" said Madame. "She may some day wound herself with one of those arrows which she discharges, as you say, so mercilessly on all sides."

"It is the hope of all the shepherds in general," said De Saint-Aignan.

"And that of the shepherd Amyntas in particular, I suppose?" said Madame.

"The shepherd Amyntas is so timid," returned De Saint-Aignan, with the most modest air he could assume, "that if he cherishes such a hope as that, no one has ever known anything about it, for he conceals it in the very depths of his heart." A flattering murmur of applause eeted the narrator's profession of faith on the part of shepherd.

"And Galatea?" inquired Madame. "I am impatient to see a hand so skilful as yours continue the portrait where Virgil left it, and finish it before our eyes."

"Madame," said De Saint-Aignan, "beside the great Virgilius Maro your humble servant is indeed but a very poor poet. Still, encouraged by your desire, I will do my best."

De Saint-Aignan extended his foot and his hand, and gave the following florid description: "White as milk, she casts upon the breeze the perfume of her fair hair, tinged with golden hues, as are the ears of corn. One is tempted to inquire if she is not the beautiful Europa, who inspired Jupiter with the tender passion as she played with her companions in the flower-bespangled meadows. From her eyes, blue as the azure heavens in the brightest summer day, emanates a tender light, which reverie feeds and which love dispenses. When she frowns, or bends her looks towards the ground, the sun is veiled in token of mourning. When she smiles, on the contrary, Nature resumes her joyousness; and the birds, which had for a moment been silenced, recommence their songs amid the leafy covert of the trees. Galatea," said De Saint-Aignan, in conclusion, "is worthy of the adoration of the whole world; and if she should ever bestow her heart upon another, happy will that mortal be whom by the gift of her virgin affections she condescends to make immortal."

Madame, who had attentively listened to the portrait De Saint-Aignan had drawn, as indeed had all the others, contented herself by indicating her approbation of the most poetic passages by occasional inclinations of her head; but it was impossible to say whether these marks of assent had been accorded to the ability of the narrator or to the likeness of the portrait. The consequence, therefore, was that as Madame did not openly exhibit any

approbation no one felt authorized to applaud, — not even Monsieur, who secretly thought that De Saint-Aignan dwelt too much upon the portraits of the shepherdesses after having somewhat slightingly passed over the portraits of the shepherds. The whole assembly seemed suddenly chilled. De Saint-Aignan, who had exhausted his rhetorical skill and his artist's brush in sketching the portrait of Galatea, and who, after the favor with which his other descriptions had been received, already imagined he could hear the loud applause for this last one, was himself more chilled than the king and the rest of the company.

A moment's silence followed, which was at last broken by Madame. "Well, Sire," she inquired, "what is your Majesty's opinion of these three portraits?"

The king, who wished to relieve De Saint-Aignan's embarrassment without compromising himself, replied, "Why, Amaryllis, in my opinion, is beautiful."

"For my part," said Monsieur, "I like Phyllis better; she is a capital girl, or rather a good-sort-of-fellow of a nymph."

A general laugh followed; and this time the looks were so direct that Montalais felt herself blushing almost scarlet.

"Well," resumed Madame, "what were those shepherdesses saying to one another?"

De Saint-Aignan, however, whose vanity had been wounded, did not feel himself in a position to sustain an attack of new and refreshed troops, and merely said, "Madame, the shepherdesses were confiding to one another their little preferences."

"Nay, nay! M. de Saint-Aignan, you are a perfect stream of pastoral poesy," said Madame. with an amiable smile, which somewhat comforted the narrator.

"They confessed that love is a great peril, but that the absence of love is the heart's sentence of death."

"What was the conclusion they came to?" inquired Madame.

"They came to the conclusion that one ought to love."

"Very good! Did they lay down any conditions?"

"That of choice, simply," said De Saint-Aignan. "I ought even to add — remember it is the dryad who is speaking — that one of the shepherdesses (Amaryllis, I believe) was completely opposed to the necessity of loving, and yet she did not positively deny that she had allowed the image of a certain shepherd to be impressed upon her heart."

"Was it Amyntas or Tyrcis?"

"Amyntas, Madame," said De Saint-Aignan, modestly. "But Galatea — the gentle and soft-eyed Galatea — immediately replied that neither Amyntas nor Alphesibœus nor Tityrus, nor indeed any of the handsomest shepherds of the country, were to be compared to Tyrcis; that Tyrcis was as superior to all other men as the oak in its grandeur to all other trees, as the lily in its majesty to all other flowers. She even drew such a portrait of Tyrcis that Tyrcis himself, who was listening, must have felt truly flattered by it, notwithstanding his rank and position. Thus Tyrcis and Amyntas had been distinguished by Amaryllis and Galatea; and thus had the secrets of two hearts been revealed beneath the shades of evening and amid the recesses of the woods. Such, Madame, is what the dryad related to me, — she who knows all that takes place in the hollows of oaks and in grassy dells; she who knows the loves of the birds, and all they wish to convey by their songs; she who understands, in fact, the language of the wind

among the branches, the humming of the insects with their golden and emerald wings in the corolla of the wild-flowers; — it was she who related the particulars to me, and I repeat them."

"And now you have finished, M. de Saint-Aignan, have you not?" said Madame, with a smile which made the king tremble.

"Quite finished," replied De Saint-Aignan, "and only too happy if I have been able to amuse your Highness for a few moments."

"Moments which have been too brief," replied the princess, "for you have related most admirably all you knew; but, my dear M. de Saint-Aignan, you have been unfortunate enough to obtain your information from one dryad only, I believe?"

"Yes, Madame, only from one, I confess."

"The fact was that you passed by a little naiad, who pretended to know nothing at all, and yet knew a great deal more than your dryad, my dear count."

"A naiad!" repeated several voices, the expectation being aroused that the story was going to have a continuation.

"Of course! Close beside the oak of which you were speaking, which, if I am not mistaken, is called the royal oak — Is it not so, M. de Saint-Aignan?"

De Saint-Aignan and the king exchanged glances.

"Yes, Madame," the former replied.

"Well, close beside the oak there is a pretty little spring, which runs murmuringly on over the pebbles, amid the forget-me-nots and daisies."

"I believe you are correct," said the king, still with some uneasiness, and listening eagerly to his sister-in-law's narrative.

"Oh, there is one, I can assure you!" said Madame;

"and the proof of it is that the naiad who rules over that little stream stopped me as I was about to cross."

"Bah!" said De Saint-Aignan.

"Yes, indeed," continued the princess; "and she did so in order to communicate to me many particulars which M. de Saint-Aignan omitted in his recital."

"Pray relate them yourself," said Monsieur; "you can relate stories in such a charming manner."

The princess bowed at the conjugal compliment paid her. "I do not possess the poetical powers of the count, nor his ability to bring out all the details."

"You will not be listened to with less interest on that account," said the king, already perceiving that something hostile was intended in his sister-in-law's story.

"I speak, too," continued Madame, "in the name of that poor little naiad, who is indeed the most charming creature I ever met. Moreover, she laughed so heartily while she was telling me her story, that, in pursuance of that medical axiom that laughter is contagious, I ask permission to laugh a little myself when I recollect her words."

The king and De Saint-Aignan, who noticed spreading over many faces a beginning of the laughter which Madame announced, finished by looking at each other, as if asking whether there were not some little conspiracy concealed beneath her words. But Madame was determined to turn the knife in the wound over and over again; she therefore resumed with an air of the most perfect innocence, — in other words, with the most dangerous of all her airs, — "Well, then, I passed that way; and as I found beneath my steps many fresh flowers newly blown, no doubt Phyllis, Amaryllis, Galatea, and all your shepherdesses had passed the same way before me."

The king bit his lips, for the recital was becoming more and more threatening. "My little naiad," continued Madame, "was murmuring her plaintive little song in the bed of her rivulet. As I perceived that she accosted me by touching the hem of my robe, I did not think of receiving her advances ungraciously; and more particularly so since, after all, a divinity, even though of inferior rank, is always of greater importance than a mortal, though a princess. I thereupon accosted the naiad; and bursting into laughter, this is what she said to me, 'Fancy, Princess —' You understand, Sire, it is the naiad who is speaking."

The king bowed assentingly; and Madame resumed: "'Fancy, Princess, the banks of my little stream have just witnessed a most amusing scene. Two shepherds full of curiosity, even indiscreetly so, have allowed themselves to be mystified in the merriest manner by three nymphs or three shepherdesses.' I beg your pardon, but I do not now remember if it were nymphs or shepherdesses she said; but it does not much matter, so we will continue."

The king at this opening colored visibly; and De Saint-Aignan, completely losing countenance, began to open his eyes in the greatest possible anxiety.

"'The two shepherds,' pursued my little naiad, still laughing, 'followed in the wake of the three young ladies,' — no, I mean, of the three nymphs; forgive me, I ought to say, of the three shepherdesses. It is not always wise to do that, for it may be awkward for those who are followed. I appeal to all the ladies present; and not one of them, I am sure, will contradict me."

The king, who was much disturbed by what he suspected was about to follow, signified his assent by a gesture.

"'But,' continued the naiad, 'the shepherdesses had noticed Tyrcis and Amyntas gliding into the wood, and by the light of the moon they had recognized them through the grove of trees.' Ah, you laugh!" interrupted Madame; "wait, you are not yet at the end."

The king turned pale. De Saint-Aignan wiped his forehead, which was bedewed with perspiration. Among the groups of ladies could be heard smothered laughter and stealthy whispers.

"'The shepherdesses, I was saying, noticing how indiscreet the two shepherds were, proceeded to sit down at the foot of the royal oak; and when they perceived that their indiscreet listeners were sufficiently near, so that not a syllable of what they were about to say could be lost, they made to them very innocently, in the most innocent manner in the world indeed, a passionate declaration, which from the vanity natural to all men, and even to the most sentimental of shepherds, seemed to the two listeners as sweet as the honeycomb.'"

The king at these words, which the assembly was unable to hear without laughing, could not restrain a flash of anger darting from his eyes. As for De Saint-Aignan, he let his head fall upon his breast, and concealed under a bitter laugh the extreme annoyance he felt.

"Oh," said the king, drawing himself up to his full height, "upon my word, that is a most amusing jest certainly, and as told by you, Madame, has lost none of its charm; but really and truly, are you sure you quite understood the language of the naiads?"

"The count, Sire, pretends to have perfectly understood that of the dryads," retorted Madame, spiritedly.

"No doubt," said the king. "But you know the count has the weakness to aspire to become a member of the Academy; so that, with this object in view, he has learned

all sorts of things of which very happily you are ignorant; and it might possibly happen that the language of the nymph of the waters might be among the number of things which you have not studied."

"You know, Sire," replied Madame, "that for facts of that nature one does not altogether rely upon one's self alone; a woman's ear is not infallible, so says Saint Augustine. I therefore wished to satisfy myself by other opinions besides my own; and as my naiad, who in her character of a goddess is polyglot — Is not that the expression, M. de Saint-Aignan?"

"Yes," said the latter, quite out of countenance.

"Well," continued the princess, "as my naiad in her character of goddess had at first spoken to me in English, I feared, as you suggest, that I might have misunderstood her; and I requested Mesdemoiselles de Montalais, de Tonnay-Charente, and de la Vallière to come to me, begging my naiad to repeat to me in the French language the recital she had already communicated to me in English."

"And did she do so?" inquired the king.

"Oh, she is the most obliging divinity that exists! Yes, Sire, she did so; so that no doubt whatever remains on the subject. Is it not so, Mesdemoiselles?" said the princess, turning towards the left of her army; "did not the naiad say precisely what I have related, and have I in any one particular exceeded the truth? Phyllis, — I beg your pardon, I mean Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais, — is it true?"

"Oh, precisely, Madame!" articulated Mademoiselle de Montalais, very distinctly.

"Is it true, Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente?"

"The perfect truth," replied Athenaïs, in a voice quite as firm, but yet not so distinct.

"And you, La Vallière?" asked Madame.

The poor girl felt the king's ardent look fixed upon her; she dared not deny it, she dared not tell a falsehood, and so bowed her head simply in token of assent. Her head, however, was not raised again, half chilled as she was by a coldness more bitter than that of death.

This triple testimony overwhelmed the king. As for De Saint-Aignan, he did not even attempt to dissemble his despair, and hardly knowing what he said, stammered out, "An excellent jest! admirably played, Mesdemoiselles shepherdesses."

"A just punishment for curiosity," said the king, in a hoarse voice. "Oh! who would think, after the chastisement that Tyrcis and Amyntas suffered, of endeavoring to surprise what is passing in the heart of shepherdesses? Assuredly, I shall not, for one; and you, Messieurs?"

"Nor I! nor I!" repeated, in a chorus, the group of courtiers.

Madame was filled with triumph at the king's annoyance; and was full of delight, thinking that her story had been, or was to be, the termination of the whole matter.

As for Monsieur, who had laughed at the two stories without comprehending anything about them, he turned towards De Guiche, and said to him, "Well, Count, you say nothing; can you not find something to say? Do you pity M. Tyrcis and M. Amyntas, perchance?"

"I pity them with all my soul," replied De Guiche; "for, in very truth, love is so sweet a fancy that to lose it, fancy though it may be, is to lose more than life itself. If, therefore, these two shepherds thought themselves beloved, — if they were happy in that idea, and if instead of that happiness they meet with not only that empty void which resembles death, but with jeers and jests at that love, which is worse than a hundred thousand

deaths, — in that case I say that Tyrcis and Amyntas are the two most unhappy men I know."

"And you are right, too, M. de Guiche," said the king; "for, in fact, the death we speak of is a very hard return for a little curiosity."

"That is as much as to say, then, that the story of my naiad has displeased the king?" asked Madame, innocently.

"Nay, Madame, undeceive yourself," said Louis, taking the princess by the hand. "Your naiad, on the contrary, has pleased me; and the more so, because she has been more truthful, and because her tale, I ought to add, is confirmed by the testimony of unimpeachable witnesses."

These words fell upon La Vallière accompanied by a look that no one, from Socrates to Montaigne, could have exactly defined. The look and the words succeeded in overpowering the unhappy girl, who with her head upon Montalais's shoulder seemed to have fainted away. The king rose without remarking this circumstance, of which no one moreover took any notice; and contrary to his usual custom, for generally he remained late in Madame's apartments, he took his leave, and retired to his own side of the palace. De Saint-Aignan followed him, leaving the rooms in as great a state of despair as he had entered them in a state of delight. Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, less sensitive to emotion than La Vallière, was not much frightened, and did not faint. However, the last look of De Saint-Aignan had hardly been so majestic as the last look of the king.

CHAPTER LXII.

ROYAL PSYCHOLOGY.

The king returned to his apartments with hurried steps. The reason he walked as fast as he did was probably to avoid tottering in his gait. He seemed to leave behind him as he went along a trace of a mysterious sorrow. That gayety of manner which every one had remarked in him on his arrival, and which all had been delighted to perceive, had not perhaps been understood in its true sense; but his stormy departure, his disordered countenance, all knew, or at least thought they could easily comprehend. Madame's levity of manner, her pleasantries, — somewhat rough for any one, especially so for a king, — and the too familiar identification of the king with an ordinary man were among the reasons which the assembly assigned for the precipitate and unexpected departure of Louis XIV.

Madame, keen-sighted enough in other respects, did not, however, at first see anything extraordinary in it. It was quite sufficient for her to have inflicted some slight wound upon the vanity or self-esteem of one who, so soon forgetting the engagements he had contracted, seemed to have undertaken to disdain without cause the noblest and highest prizes. It was not an unimportant matter for her, in the present position of affairs, to let the king perceive the difference which existed between the bestowal of his affections on one in a high station and

the running after some passing fancy, like a younger son fresh from the provinces. By indulging in amours of the higher class, having in view their dignity and power, and preserving in them a certain formality and ostentation, a monarch not only did not act in a manner derogatory to his high position, but found even a repose, security, mystery, and general respect therein. On the contrary, in the debasement of vulgar intrigues, he would encounter, even among his meanest subjects, carping and sarcastic remarks; he would forfeit his character of infallibility and inviolability. Having descended to the region of petty human miseries, he would be subjected to its paltry contentions. In a word, to convert the royal divinity into a mere mortal by striking at his heart, or rather even at his face, like the meanest of his subjects, was to inflict a terrible blow upon the pride of that generous nature. Louis was more easily captivated by vanity than by love. Madame had wisely calculated her vengeance, and, as has been seen, she obtained it.

Let it not be supposed, however, that Madame possessed such terrible passions as the heroines of the Middle Ages possessed, or that she regarded things from a serious point of view; on the contrary, Madame, young, amiable, of cultivated intellect, coquettish, loving in her nature, — but rather from fancy or imagination or ambition than from her heart, — Madame, we say, on the contrary, inaugurated that epoch of light and fleeting amusements which distinguished the hundred and twenty years that intervened between the middle of the seventeenth century and the last quarter of the eighteenth. Madame saw, therefore, or rather fancied that she saw, things under their true aspect. She knew that the king, her august brother-in-law, had been the first to ridicule the humble La Vallière, and that, in accordance with his usual cus-

tom, it was hardly probable he would ever love the person who had excited his laughter, even had it been only for a moment. Moreover, was not her vanity present, — that evil influence which plays so important a part in that comedy of dramatic incidents called the life of a woman? Did not her vanity tell her, aloud, in a subdued voice, in a whisper, in every variety of tone, that she could not, in reality, — she a princess, young, beautiful, and rich, — be compared with the poor La Vallière, as youthful as herself, it is true, but far less pretty certainly, and utterly poor? And there is nothing surprising in this; for it is known that the greatest characters are those who flatter themselves the most in the comparison they draw between themselves and others, between others and themselves.

It may perhaps be asked, What was Madame's motive for an attack which had been so skilfully combined? Why was there such a display of forces, if it were not seriously the intention to dislodge the king from a heart that had never been occupied before, in which he seemed disposed to take refuge? Was there any necessity, then, for Madame to attach so great an importance to La Vallière, if she did not fear her? No; Madame did not regard La Vallière from that point of view in which an historian, who knows everything, sees into the future, or rather the past. Madame was neither a prophetess nor a sibyl; nor could she, any more than another, read what was written in that terrible and fatal book of the future, which guards in its most secret pages the most serious events. No; Madame desired simply to punish the king for having availed himself of secret means altogether feminine in their nature. She wished to prove to him clearly that if he made use of offensive weapons of that nature, she, a woman of ready wit and high descent, would assuredly discover, in the arsenal of her imagina

tion, defensive weapons proof even against the thrusts of a monarch. Moreover, she wished him to learn that in a warfare of that description kings are held of no account, or, at all events, that kings who fight on their own behalf, like ordinary individuals, may witness the fall of their crown in the first encounter; and that, in fact, if he had expected to be adored by all the ladies of the court from the very first, from a confident reliance on his mere appearance, it was a pretension which was most preposterous, and insulting even towards certain persons who filled a higher position than others; and that a lesson taught in season to this royal personage, who assumed too high and haughty a carriage, would be rendering him a great service.

Such, indeed, were Madame's reflections with respect to the king. The event itself was not thought of. And with this purpose it has been seen that she had exercised her influence over the minds of her maids of honor, and with all its accompanying details had arranged the comedy which had just been acted. The king was completely bewildered by it; for the first time since he had escaped from the trammels of M. de Mazarin, he found himself treated as a man. A similar severity from any of his subjects would have been at once resisted by him. *Les pouvoirs croissent dans la lutte.* But to attack women, to be attacked by them, to have been imposed upon by mere girls from the country, who had come from Blois expressly for that purpose, — it was the depth of dishonor for a young sovereign full of that vanity with which his personal advantages and his royal power inspired him. There was nothing he could do; he could resort neither to reproaches nor exile, nor could he show the annoyance he felt. To show any vexation would have been to admit that he had been touched, like Hamlet, by a

sword from which the button had been removed, — the sword of ridicule. To show vexation towards women, what humiliation! — especially when the women in question have laughter on their side as a means of vengeance. Oh! if instead of leaving all the responsibility of the affair to these women, one of the courtiers had had anything to do with the intrigue, how delightedly would Louis XIV. have seized the opportunity of turning the Bastille to account! But there again the king's anger paused, checked by reason. To be the master of armies, of prisons, of an almost divine authority, and to exert that almost almighty power in the service of a petty grudge, would be unworthy not only of a monarch, but even of a man.

It was necessary, therefore, simply to swallow the affront in silence, and to wear his usual gentleness and graciousness of expression. It was necessary to treat Madame as a friend. As a friend! — and why not? Either Madame had been the instigator of the affair, or the affair itself had found her passive. If she had been the instigator of it, it certainly was a bold measure on her part; but, at all events, it was only natural in her. Who was it that had sought her in the earliest moments of her honeymoon, to whisper words of love in her ear? Who was it that had dared to calculate the possibility of committing a crime against the marriage vow, — a crime, too, still more deplorable on account of the relationship between them? Who was it that, shielded behind his royal omnipotence, had said to this young woman, "Be not afraid; love but the King of France, who is above all, and a movement of whose sceptred hand will protect you against all attacks, even from your own remorse"? And she had listened to and obeyed the royal voice, had been influenced by his ensnaring tones; and now that she had,

morally speaking, sacrificed her honor in listening to him, she saw herself repaid for her sacrifice by an infidelity the more humiliating, since it was occasioned by a woman far beneath her own station, — she who at first had thought that she was beloved.

Had Madame, therefore, been the instigator of the revenge, she would have been right. If, on the contrary, she had remained passive in the whole affair, what grounds had the king to be angry with her on that account? Was it for her to restrain, or rather could she restrain, the chattering of a few country girls; and was it for her, by an excess of zeal which might have been misinterpreted, to check, at the risk of increasing it, the impertinence of their conduct? All these various reasonings were like so many actual stings to the king's pride; but when he had carefully in his own mind gone over all his causes for complaint, Louis XIV. was surprised, upon due reflection, — in other words, after the wound had been dressed, — to find that there were other causes of suffering, secret, unendurable, and unrevealed. There was one circumstance which he dared not confess even to himself; namely, that the acute pain from which he was suffering had its seat in his heart. The fact is, he had permitted his heart to be gratified by La Vallière's innocent confession. He had dreamed of a pure affection, — of an affection for Louis the man, and not the sovereign, — of an affection free from all self-interest; and his heart, more youthful and more simple than he had imagined it to be, had bounded forward to meet that other heart which had just revealed itself to him by its aspirations.

The commonest thing in the complicated history of love is the double inoculation of love to which any two hearts are subjected; the one loves nearly always before the other, and the latter almost always follows the ex-

ample. In this way the electric current is established, in proportion to the intensity of the passion which is first kindled. The more Mademoiselle de la Vallière had shown her affection, the more the king's affection had increased. And it was precisely that which had surprised his Majesty. For it had been fairly demonstrated to him that no sympathetic current could have been the means of hurrying his heart away in its course, because there had been no confession of love in the case; because the confession was, in fact, an insult towards the man and towards the sovereign; and finally, because — and the word, too, burned like a hot iron, — because, in fact, it was nothing but a hoax, after all. This girl, therefore, who in strictness could not lay claim to beauty or birth or great intelligence, — who had been selected by Madame herself on account of her unpretending qualities, — had not only aroused the king's regard, but had moreover treated him with disdain, — him, the king, a man who, like an Eastern potentate, had but to bestow a glance, to indicate with his finger, to drop his handkerchief. And since the previous evening his mind had been so absorbed with this girl that he could think and dream of nothing but her. Since the previous evening his imagination had been occupied by clothing her image with all those charms to which she could not lay claim. In very truth, he whom such vast interests summoned, and whom so many women smiled upon invitingly, had since the previous evening consecrated every moment of his time, every throb of his heart, to this sole dream. It was, indeed, either too much or not enough.

The indignation of the king, making him forget everything, and among others that De Saint-Aignan was present, was poured out in the most violent imprecations. True it is that De Saint-Aignan had taken refuge in a

corner of the room, and from his corner regarded the tempest passing over. His own personal disappointment seemed contemptible, in comparison with the anger of the king. He compared with his own petty vanity the prodigious pride of offended majesty; and being well read in the hearts of kings in general, and in those of powerful kings in particular, he began to ask himself if this weight of anger, as yet held in suspense, would not soon terminate by falling upon his own head, for the very reason that others were guilty, and he innocent.

In point of fact, the king all at once did arrest his hurried pace; and fixing a look full of anger upon De Saint-Aignan, suddenly cried out, "And you, De Saint-Aignan?"

De Saint-Aignan made a movement which was intended to signify, "Well, Sire?"

"Yes; you have been as silly as myself, I think."

"Sire!" stammered De Saint-Aignan.

"You permitted yourself to be deceived by this shameful trick."

"Sire," said De Saint-Aignan, whose agitation was such as to make him tremble in every limb, "let me entreat your Majesty not to exasperate yourself. Women, you know, are creatures full of imperfections, created for the misfortune of others; to expect anything good from them is to require them to do impossibilities."

The king, who had the greatest consideration for himself, and who had begun to acquire over his emotions that command which he preserved over them all his life, perceived that he was doing an outrage to his own dignity in displaying so much animation about so trifling an object. "No," he said hastily; "you are mistaken, De Saint-Aignan. I am not angry; I can only wonder that we should have been turned into ridicule so cleverly and

with such boldness, by these two young girls. I am particularly surprised that, although we might have been accurately informed on the subject, we were silly enough to leave the matter for our own hearts to decide upon."

"The heart, Sire, is an organ which requires positively to be reduced to its physical functions, which must be deprived of all moral functions. For my own part, I confess that when I saw that your Majesty's heart was so taken up by this little — "

"My heart taken up! I! My mind might perhaps have been so; but as for my heart, it was — " Louis again perceived that in order to cover one gap he was about to disclose another. "Besides," he added, "I have no fault to find with the girl. I was quite aware that she was in love with some one else."

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne. I informed your Majesty of the circumstance."

"You did so; but you were not the first who told me. The Comte de la Fère had solicited from me Mademoiselle de la Vallière's hand for his son; and on his return from England the marriage shall be celebrated, since they love each other."

"I recognize in that all the generosity of the king."

"So, Saint-Aignan, we will cease to occupy ourselves with these matters any longer," said Louis.

"Yes, we will digest the affront, Sire," replied the courtier, with resignation.

"Besides, it will be a very easy matter to do so," said the king, checking a sigh.

"And by way of a beginning, I will set about the composition of some good epigram upon the trio. I will call it 'The Naiad and the Dryad,' which will please Madame."

"Do so, Saint-Aignan!" said the king, indifferently. "You shall read me your verses; they will amuse me.

Ah ! it is of no use, Saint-Aignan," added the king, like a man breathing with difficulty ; " the blow requires more than human strength to bear it in a dignified manner."

As the king thus spoke, assuming an air of the most angelic patience, one of the servants in attendance knocked gently at the door. De Saint-Aignan drew aside, out of respect.

" Come in," said the king. The servant partially opened the door. " What is it ? " inquired Louis.

The servant held out a letter folded in a triangular shape. " For your Majesty," he said.

" From whom ? "

" I do not know. One of the officers on duty gave it to me."

The valet, on a sign from the king, handed him the letter. The king advanced towards the candles, opened the note, read the signature, and uttered a loud cry.

De Saint-Aignan was sufficiently respectful not to look on ; but without doing so, he saw and heard all, and ran towards the king, who with a gesture dismissed the servant.

" Oh, heavens ! " said the king, as he read the note.

" Is your Majesty unwell ? " inquired De Saint-Aignan, stretching forward his arms.

" No, no, Saint-Aignan, — read ! " and he handed him the note.

De Saint-Aignan's eyes fell upon the signature. " La Vallière ! " he exclaimed. " Oh, Sire ! "

" Read, read ! "

And De Saint-Aignan read : —

Forgive my importunity, Sire ; forgive, especially, the want of formality in this letter. A note seems to me more speedy and more urgent than a despatch. I venture, therefore, to address this note to your Majesty. I have returned to my own room, overcome with grief and fatigue, Sire ; and I im

plore of your Majesty the favor of an audience, in which I may tell the truth to my king.

LOUISE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

"Well?" asked the king, taking the letter from De Saint-Aignan's hands, who was completely bewildered by what he had just read.

"Well!" repeated De Saint-Aignan.

"What do you think of it?"

"I hardly know."

"Still, what is your opinion?"

"Sire, the young lady must have heard the muttering of the thunder, and has got frightened."

"Frightened at what?" asked Louis, with dignity.

"Why, your Majesty has a thousand reasons to be angry with the author or authors of so hazardous a joke; and if your Majesty's memory were to be awakened in a disagreeable sense, it would be a perpetual menace hanging over the head of this imprudent girl."

"Saint-Aignan, I do not think as you do."

"Your Majesty doubtless sees more clearly than I do."

"Well! I see affliction and restraint in these lines, and more particularly since I recollect some of the details of the scene which took place this evening in Madame's apartments. In fact —" The king suddenly stopped, leaving his meaning unexpressed.

"In fact," resumed De Saint-Aignan, "your Majesty will grant an audience; nothing is clearer than that in the whole affair."

"I will do better still, Saint-Aignan."

"What is that, Sire?"

"Put on your cloak!"

"But, Sire —"

"You know the room where Madame's maids of honor are lodged?"

"Certainly."

"You know some means of obtaining an entrance there?"

"Oh, as to that, no!"

"At all events, you must be acquainted with some one there."

"Indeed, your Majesty has suggested a very good idea."

"You do know some one, then? Who is it?"

"I know a certain gentleman who is on very good terms with a certain young lady there."

"One of the maids of honor?"

"Yes, Sire."

"With Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente, I suppose?" said the king, laughing.

"Unfortunately, no, Sire; with Montalais."

"What is his name?"

"Malicorne."

"And you can depend on him?"

"I believe so, Sire. He ought to have a key of some sort in his possession; and if he should happen to have one, as I have done him a service, why, he will return it."

"Nothing could be better. Let us set off, then."

"I am at your Majesty's service."

The king threw his own cloak over De Saint-Aignan's shoulders, asked him for his, and then both went out into the vestibule.

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